



BABS
THE
IMPOSSIBLE

SARAH GRAND

C. G. Mitchell

Kennebunk Beach

Me

1901

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[p. 103]

“ ‘ THE VOICE THAT SPEAKS TO ME HERE ’ ”

Babs the Impossible

By SARAH GRAND
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TWINS" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
ARTHUR I. KELLER



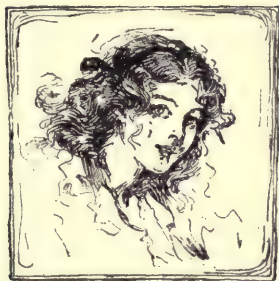
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Do you think that only those who have reached maturity are interesting? You forget that the bud may be sweeter, and often in form is more beautiful, than the full-blown flower; and surely dimly foreshadowed possibilities, by causing pleasurable conjectures, delight the mind and exercise it more wholesomely than those dry facts which have but to be acquired, and leave nothing to be anticipated, hoped for, or feared, because they leave nothing doubtful. Pause, then, a moment here and contemplate these children.

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THERE, on the brow of the hill, pausing involuntarily, as though taken unawares, and with a sigh of satisfaction in joy of the prospect, the wayfarer lingered awhile. Below, and round about, there curved an undulating valley, a happy, fertile space of wood and water, meadow and arable lands, bounded by gentle eminences, and on the highest, dominating all, an old gray tower. The wild woods climbed to the foot of the tower and there stood sentinel, dark and threatening, as though they guarded a treasure. Lower down the hill was the mansion to which the tower belonged ; but because of the giant trees its presence was scarcely to be suspected. It was the tower that commanded attention. On the other side of the valley the smoke betrayed a village, which was also not to be seen because of the sheltering trees. Concealment was the characteristic of the whole neighborhood. It was as if the inhabitants had combined to hide their dwellings. At the first glance it seemed as if the valley were uninhabited ; but a searching eye discovered the gables of some few gentlemen's houses nestling among the woods ; not many, though, for the estates of the land-owners thereabouts were all extensive. Kingconstance, of Dane Court ; Normanton, of Normanton Hall, the Wyldes, of Wyldeholme ; and

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Cadenhouse owned all the property in sight, and much besides ; and the population of the neighborhood consisted, for the most part, of the tenants and laborers on their various estates. On a still day, in a district which seemed so sparsely populated, the many and various sounds of life which were heard ascending from unseen sources produced a strange effect. The barking of dogs, the lowing of cattle and cackle of poultry, hammerings and shoutings and snatches of song, uprose continually, but muffled, as though they were echoes of olden times, full fraught with mysterious significance. And above all was the sound of bells.

From the square church tower of Danehurst, and from an invisible spire farther away and another nearer at hand, across the quiet fields they floated up to the brow of the hill—the notes—intermittent, recurrent, persistent; notes of joy and sadness, chime and toll, marriage and burial ; the ordinary inevitable warning of the hour from quarter to quarter, which means so much or so little, according to the mood it strikes ; and the Sabbath jangle, in which was invitation to rest, to pray, to aspire, to be at peace ; all tinged with melancholy, and all curiously remote. Indeed, so remote in its aspect was the whole beautiful region that it was hard to realize that there entered into it any experience not of romance or fairy, that under the picturesque chimney-stacks of those great houses, behind the gables of those pointed roofs, sheltered by opinion, cradled in luxury for ages, with the inherited ease and refinement of a privileged class to aid them in their social intercourse, far from the blatantly wicked world—it was hard to realize that there humanity seethed the same as in sordid surroundings in its passions, its ambitions, its greatness, and its

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littleness, that there, as elsewhere, the delights of love were embowered and the bitterness of hate. It was an impression of perfect serenity that the mind received from the scene. In the contemplation of that happy valley, with its running streams like ribbons of silver, shining and sparkling, its quiet fields and stately woods, all nestling in the sheltering embrace of the gentle, protecting hills, the desire for love itself grew faint as breaking wavelets in a summer calm, and thoughts of evil in association with the place jarred like a discord. Buddha himself might have found a Bô tree there and entered into ecstasy undisturbed.

So it seemed, for the country all round was curiously out of the world for this age of ours. It was seventeen miles from a railway station, and the fault, if fault it were, had been the fault of the Cadenhouse of that day, who, when the question of railways arose, had had no mind to have his lovely lands defaced, and all the heavenly tranquillity of the vale disturbed by a shrieking monster of iron and unrest, bringing in its wake the vulgar herd, with defilement of smoke, and blight of sulphur and scalding steam. He objected, and the inhabitants had upheld him in his objection. They had prayed that the trains might pass them by on the other side of the county, and their prayer had been granted—much to their subsequent chagrin when they found themselves left high and dry in their village of Danehurst, on the confines of what men call progress ; near enough to be moved by the wind of it, and to appreciate their loss, but too far off to have the emotions infused into them which should have stirred them from the stagnation of generations and roused them to energy and enterprise. So nobody was satisfied—nobody, that is to say, but Caden-

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house, son of the objector—the Cadenhouse of to-day, our Cadenhouse.

He had in his early youth travelled much and seen much of mankind, and then, because he wanted to comprehend, he came home. People go to the cities to see life ; but when they want to know life they return to the quiet fields. Human nature is the same everywhere, but it is in single specimens, and not in the restless mass, stripped of all individuality and moulded by friction into conventional forms, that the student still finds traits which are worth his research.

The old gray tower belonged to Lord Cadenhouse, and there he spent much of his time. By the many, he himself and his tower were freely discussed for a certain mystery that attached to them. What he did there exactly people could not guess—whether he studied astronomy or astrology, whether he sought to commune with the highest by means of fasting and prayer, or with the lowest by means of charms and incantation, whether his knowledge were ordinary or occult, had not been explained to them ; but they knew he did something unusual, if not uncanny, such as sitting up alone at night, and therefore they held him in the same kind of consideration in which they held other phenomena when they suspected potential qualities that might at any moment result in surprises. Popular interest in him might lapse, but it never failed. He formed the stand-by of conversation at all gatherings. The other land-owners were strangely reserved about him. They spoke freely of Billy Normanton and his little weakness for whiskey in the evenings, of young Wylde, who had the reputation of being much the same by nature as by name, and of Mrs. Kingconstance, the widow, and how she was handi-

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capped, so far as marrying again might go, by having to nurse the property for that delicate boy Montacute. They pitied her, too, for being saddled with that sister-in-law of hers, poor Miss Lorraine Kingconstance, and did not expect her two daughters to be much of a comfort to her, either—Julia would want some managing, my word ! and as to Lorraine the younger—commonly called Babs the Impossible—why, didn't the name amply describe her ? But when it came to Cadenhouse, criticism ran dry. They had no fault to find with him, but that in itself was a fault. They felt a certain aloofness in him which did not please them. But of all this Cadenhouse himself had no suspicion. It had not occurred to him that he and his tower would be talked about at all.

Cadenhouse loved the tower, and had found fertilizing food for thought in the associations that clung about it. It had been built for a watch-tower in olden times. The lands about were near enough to the sea-coast to be liable to incursion. Roman and Norseman and Norman had been there in turn, harrying the people ; and there were still found bones and weapons, and ornaments cunningly wrought in precious metals, eloquent traces of the human being, the same then as now in his primitive attributes, the wild beast in him glorying in bloodshed, and the reproductive animal artfully adorning himself to allure. Many a mighty man had been spied from the top of the tower and speared at its foot, and many a beautiful, healthy, happy creature. Blood ! it was always blood ! And, although the tide of war which swirled about the tower had ebbed away ages ago, the tradition remained. The history of the tower is the history of civilization. The law of love has established churches to enforce it, and it is on the lips of many

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priests, but in the hearts of how few ! The power of love is little suspected and less understood ; but the power of hate is glorified. Love is preached, but hate is practised. Yet slowly, in spite of everything, the law fulfils itself. The tide has turned. About the tower where blood flowed freely once, and dastardly deeds of cruelty were approved, the grass grows green. The watcher on the summit no longer fears the foe—he gazes to other purpose now. On bright, clear days he looks down tranquilly on the tranquil land—green, fertile, well wooded, well watered—on husbandmen ploughing or reaping or sowing, on garnered grain and grazing cattle, and every evidence of happy industry, of peace and plenty ; while away in the distance, yet well within sight, there sparkles, bright blue and mysterious, a beautiful strip of sea. White-winged yachts flit over it, ocean steamships pass to their ports, fleets of fishing-smacks with ruddy sails drop out from under the hill and stream away single file to their fishing-grounds, full-rigged ships haunt the horizon, and near the shore moves an occasional pleasure-boat, idle, aimless, but not inactive. Nothing more beautiful, more indicative, than that prospect of earth and sea and sky was ever seen. There was included in the limitless expanse all that makes life lovely here, while in the mystery of its blue distances, in its immensity, were suggestions of the infinite, and of that which argues in us for something beyond our finite faculties and for eternity.

BABS

THE IMPOSSIBLE

CHAPTER I

BABS the Impossible sat on the edge of her bed, looking up, with the face of an angel and a heart full of guile. She was looking at the portrait of an ancestor of hers on the wall opposite. Her ancestor had merry eyes that followed her all about the room. He had been put there in disgrace for having had himself so badly painted ; but he did not seem to mind. Neither did Babs when *she* was sent there in disgrace, which was pretty often.

"I'm bored," she said in herself, addressing the portrait. "What shall I do next?"

And, as if from the portrait in answer, there came to her the words :

"There is a power whose care
Traces thy way along the pathless coast,
The desert, and illimitable air,
Lone wand'ring, but not lost."

Babs sat with her eyes on her ancestor, reflecting deeply. It was not the first time the oracle had delivered

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to her that same inscrutable suggestion, and she could not make it out.

One of the blinds was up, but there was nothing special to look at outside. On a sudden, however, a strange light flowed across the valley from the summit of the hill opposite. It shone right into the chamber where Babs sat, and she transferred her attention to it. She knew that light of old. As a rule, it was elusive, but there were times when it glowed like a sentient thing with colors that came and went to show emotion. Now for a moment it flashed forth red, green, and milky white; but instantly it had assumed its elusive appearance, and shone a soft, luminous haze in the distance. So rapid was the transformation that Babs thought she had been deceived in her first impression.

"Cadenhouse has come home," she said to herself, solemnly; then she arose.

She had had a busy day, but a day of doubtful delights. Pursuits that she had entered upon in eager anticipation of pleasure had not proved to be so very amusing, after all. In contemplation of them, her plans had all been promising, but when she tried to work them out something for which she had not allowed came into the game, and made it perplexing and difficult, instead of easy and agreeable.

First of all, there had been lessons and the ever-recurring disputes with her governess. Babs disliked books. She never had the slightest curiosity to know what was in them, although she was fifteen. What she understood by learning did not allure her. She had no ambition to be master of any subject, and it was in vain that Miss Minton, her governess, had striven to stir up a proper spirit of emulation in her.

"You will be sorry for it by-and-by," Miss Minton had

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said to her only that morning in the school-room. "Look at Julia—"

"Physical impossibility," said Babs, impertinently. "Julia isn't here."

Miss Minton compressed her lips and shook her head.

"It's not that you haven't brains of a kind, Lorraine," she said, "for you certainly have. If you were really stupid, I should pity you and be kind and patient with you, and not attempt to force you; but as it is, I don't know what to do. I'm here to teach you—I'm paid to teach you; and although it is not my fault that I teach you nothing, I have conscientious scruples about taking money which I do not earn."

"Give Julia a double dose of teaching, then," said Babs, "to balance your scruples."

"Lorraine, I must insist upon being respected."

"Oh, I respect you right enough—your character, you know," Babs assured her, cordially. "It's in your arguments I find the flaws."

Miss Minton paused, frowning with perplexity.

"Julia," she recommenced at last, with the precision of suppressed irritation—"Julia does the highest honor to my poor efforts. She will be a credit to her family. When she comes out people will be amazed at her brilliant accomplishments."

"When *I* come out they'll be amazed at my brilliant ignorance," said Babs; "and that will amuse them most—it's not so common."

Miss Minton had a fine, earnest, expressive face. She was one of the new generation of teachers, who study human nature and know something of its endless variety. She did not attempt to apply the same rule to Babs that answered with her more conventional sister Julia; but she had tried, and tried again in vain, to find the word that should appeal to Babs to persuade her.

"Lorraine," she began once more, after another pause,

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"I feel disheartened. When you go out into the world, believe me, you will look back upon these wasted days and bitterly regret the spirit of opposition which is making you decline to profit by the great advantages that God has given you. I don't think I am unkind to you, I don't think I am unsympathetic; but if you have any complaint to make of me, if you could be different were I different, tell me."

Babs's sensitive face flushed.

"Please don't speak to me like that, Miss Minton," she exclaimed. "I think you're a brick, and I always say so. But that doesn't alter *me*, you know."

"Don't say 'brick,' dear."

"Well, pearl, then. You're a pearl of great price, Miss Minton—worth your salary, every penny of it, and all we can give you in the way of gratitude besides."

Miss Minton sighed.

"Such ridiculous exaggeration fails of its effect," she said.

"No, but, Miss Minton, I do mean you're a good sort," Babs protested.

"A good sort!" Miss Minton ejaculated. "Your whole tone is deplorable."

"I know," said Babs.

"But if you'd try, dear," Miss Minton pleaded.

"It isn't a bit of use," Babs answered, cheerfully—"not a bit."

"That's because you don't try."

"No, it isn't; it's because I have tried, and I know. The more I pore over those beastly books—"

Miss Minton tapped on the table sharply with the ruler. Babs started, and raised her eyebrows interrogatively.

"What kind of books?" Miss Minton demanded.

"Those objectionable books," Babs reeled off, unabashed. "The more I try to master them, the less I learn. But when I don't try—when I persevere long



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enough in not trying—then things come to me—things that I seem to understand better than the things that have been explained to me, if you know what I mean.”

“ It sounds very like nonsense,” said Miss Minton, dryly. “ But at any rate, we can’t go on like this. You don’t know a single lesson to-day, and here you have been sitting all the morning with a book before you and your eyes on the view from that window, not making the slightest attempt to learn. I cannot conscientiously let you go on like this. I must tell your mamma.”

Babs’s eyes had again sought the distant prospect while Miss Minton was speaking.

“ Mamma be blowed !” she ejaculated, dreamily.

“ Lorraine !”

“ Gently wafted away, then, if you like that better,” said Babs.

“ Really, Lorraine, your language is—”

“ A sign of the antiquity of my family,” said Lorraine, casting her eyes about as if she were looking for something. “ Language always goes to the bad in old families. It’s the new people who are genteel. *We’re* nearer to nature.”

She rose as she spoke, and in her hurry tipped up the table with a sudden jerk, so that everything on it, including the inkstand, slid down into Miss Minton’s lap, made a dash for the door, and had disappeared before the governess knew what was happening.

Miss Minton picked up the things patiently, and put the room tidy, lingering over the task because she felt it her duty to appear before Mrs. Kingconstance to show her ink-stained gown and complain of Babs; and Miss Minton hated to have to complain of Babs. Even as she put the room to rights she began to make excuses for her. She thought the weather had something to do with her perversity, for the wind was cold, the sky was

lowering, and the day altogether was sombre and sad—a day to make the sensitive shiver.

But there are some enviable beings who, during their blissful span of life, set atmospheric pressure at naught and never know which way the wind blows. Mrs. Kingconstance was one of these. If the sun shone, she ordered the carriage; if the rain fell, she ordered a fire; but in either case she was quite content. No foolish wish to alter the unalterable had ever disturbed her. She had never tried to plumb hidden depths of heart and soul, nor sought to see beneath the surface of society. She had no notion, in fact, that society was anything but surface. As the people she met appeared to her, so she understood them to be. She herself was one of those of whom it is said that they are always the same. This is meant for a compliment by the unobservant, who, having no wisdom themselves, nor power to apply the wisdom of others, go unwitting of the word that holds up to us “infinite variety” as the one charm that is ageless and deathless.

Life was no enigma to Mrs. Kingconstance, for the simple reason that she was content with such knowledge of it as she possessed. Progress did not enter into her state; it was stagnant. She had no vague longings for she knew not what, no vain regrets. The little world of her experience satisfied her, and it was natural that it should, for she found herself exactly where she wished to be. Her income was ample, and, being the widow of a large land-owner and mother of a young inheritor, for whom it was her congenial duty to keep up the family mansion and nurse the estates, she looked down upon life from a desirable but not too elevated position, and that is by far the best place from which to obtain a satisfactory view of it. It is less enchanting to be upon the heights than to look upon them. Who is so thrilled as your snob of good birth when royalty smiles upon him?

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Royalty itself knows no thrill to be compared to it. Situated as Mrs. Kingconstance was, such glimpses as she obtained of the most scandalous social intrigues took on the interest of picturesque romance, and even horrors of battle, of suffering at sea, of privation, of disease, did not disturb her, but, on the contrary, being stripped by gentlemanly journalists of shrieks and groans, distorted features, scattered brains, torn limbs, and bleeding wounds, these events merely appealed to her as items of interest sufficiently exciting to be a welcome variety. She could sip her afternoon tea complacently while reading accounts of horrid crimes in the best newspapers. Only, of course, she always said the right thing on such subjects, such as "Dear ! dear !" and "How very dreadful !"—which was natural, for who expects a handsome woman of thirty-eight, with health, wealth, and position, to do more ?

It was comfort that Mrs. Kingconstance aimed at in everything, and that not only for herself, be it said to her credit, but for everybody in her establishment. If the comfortable happened to clash with the picturesque, she preferred the comfortable. She had substituted sashes with plate-glass for lattice windows all over the house, because they fitted best. "Lattices are all very well in poetry," she said, "but pretty words don't keep the cold out." And in order to prevent damp and insure heat she had caused the old, mellow red-brick mansion to be covered with a great coat of gray cement. She had no sentiment about old furniture, either. She particularly disliked worm-eaten wood. Design was all very well, but she must have everything made in nice new wood, well seasoned. Her own sitting-room was naturally characteristic. Everything in it was a luxury. Inlaid satin-wood, great down cushions, broad couches, deep easy-chairs, the sheen of silk and satin coverings, the harmony of various tints and tones of delicate color, the

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pictures, the china, all combined to produce an eminently luxurious effect. Not a note jarred. Mrs. Kingconstance simply called it comfort. But then she had never known what it was to be a day without lovely, costly things to refresh her mind and delight her eyes. Habit had made them the mere common necessities of life to her, and she had no idea of their value apart from their usefulness and the pleasure they gave. About her all was redundant, and she herself threatened to be the same.

There is a touch of mimicry in nature, to which human nature is also liable, so that we often see in people somewhat of the quality that specially distinguishes their surroundings. There is action and reaction in this. Mrs. Kingconstance was responsible for the luxury about her; but the luxury about her was in turn responsible for what Mrs. Kingconstance was becoming. She was already more ample than a woman of thirty-eight need be in active life. Not that she was fat, but fat was threatening. At present she was only just full-blown; but she lolled too much on luxurious cushions, she tasted every morsel of her food too scrupulously when it was specially to her liking—which it generally was—and she cultivated content to an extreme that was dangerous. Thankfulness for her lot in life distinguished her. "My fate might have been otherwise," she would say by way of reproof to her sister-in-law, Miss Kingconstance, who was not at all of her disposition; but such as it is, I am thankful for it. We *ought* to be contented with our lot in life." And then she would nestle in her easiest chair, with just a glance at the clock, perhaps. But she never permitted herself to wish that the time might fly; she prided herself upon that. Not even would she wish for the most important time of the day to come quicker—the dinner-time.

The interview with Miss Minton was over. It had ruf-

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fled Mrs. Kingconstance considerably for the moment, but by the time she retired to her own sitting-room after luncheon there was very little of that sensation left. She had recovered her equanimity by the simple expedient of transferring her own responsibility to another person. Miss Minton had declared that something must be done—that it would not do to let Babs have it all her own way. Mrs. Kingconstance agreed, but she never dreamed of troubling her own head as to what should be done. She sent, instead, for the vicar of the parish, and was now tranquilly awaiting his arrival. She had great confidence in the Honorable and Reverend Wilfred Wyndham Worringham—more confidence in the “Honorable,” perhaps, than in the “Reverend.” Most of the people about there had. They might forget that he was a “Reverend” by profession, but they never forgot that he was an “Honorable” by courtesy. That is the kind of thing to which people attach importance seventeen miles from a railway station.

Mrs. Kingconstance was clever with her fingers. She made beautiful real lace with bobbins on a satin pillow. And now, while she waited, she worked. It was delicate work, requiring much nicety of touch; but she moved her white fingers among the bobbins rapidly, and with little care, as it seemed, like one who has acquired skill and facility by long practice; and, as she worked, the gems in her rings flashed iridescent in the fire-light, and the expression of her countenance varied from one degree of amiability to another. The weather without and the warmth within combined to comfort her by force of contrast. Bitter squalls of wind and rain beat upon the windows, but the thick plate-glass and the well-fitting sashes defied their onslaught, while the amber red of the fire glowed all the brighter for the chilly gray background of sombre sky.

Presently the door began to open, as if of itself, in a

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languid way. Mrs. Kingconstance happened to glance towards it at the moment, otherwise she would not have known that it was opening, so gently was it done. There was something mysterious in the almost imperceptible motion of it. If spirits opened doors instead of passing through them, they might be expected to open them so. But Mrs. Kingconstance watched the movement undisturbed, her face meanwhile melting from mild expectancy into a smile of greeting as a slender, elegant lady of no certain age sauntered in with a listless step, looking more, however, as if she hated the exertion than as if she were unequal to it. She shut the door as she had opened it—slowly, slowly.

“You are late to-day, Lorraine,” Mrs. Kingconstance said. “I hope you are well?”

The lady answered, carelessly: “Indifferent well, I thank you. And you?”

“The same, thanks,” Mrs. Kingconstance said, smiling; then added, “A quaint old phrase.”

“Yes, and expressive,” was the reply.

Mrs. Kingconstance went on with her work. The lady—her sister-in-law, Miss Kingconstance—sank slowly into an easy-chair by the fire, and sat with her eyes thoughtfully fixed on the flame.

“Indifferent well,” she muttered, at last. “I was just thinking. We go about everything in a half-hearted way; and the best we do is but indifferent well done.”

Mrs. Kingconstance smiled vaguely, her fingers moving the while among her bobbins rhythmically.

“So you are not going away for a little change, after all?” she ventured, after a pause.

“No,” the other rejoined; then she rose restlessly and began to saunter about the room. “What is the use?” she asked.

“It might do you good.”

“As likely as that I shall ever do any good myself. If

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change could have done me any good, we have change enough here—change of weather, change of season, and the great change from the bare branch to the green leaf, which should enliven us all, but never affects me, except in so far as it moves me to observe that it does not do so. I am numb ; I am dead ; I have ceased to care.”

Mrs. Kingconstance continued to make lace tranquilly. Her normal condition of content, due to physical well-being, was not to be disturbed by such a trifle as another person’s unhappy state of mind.

There was another pause after her companion had ceased to speak, during which Miss Kingconstance returned to the fireplace and stood looking down into the fire. Once or twice she sighed heavily, then she muttered, in a voice like an inarticulate sigh,

“Dead, long dead, long dead,
And my heart is a handful of dust.”

Mrs. Kingconstance looked at her with a tentative smile.

“We must have some more coals, I think,” she said, then waited a moment ; but as the other lady did not move, she was obliged to put down her work and get up and ring for them herself.

Miss Kingconstance awoke to the fact of her remissness.

“Pardon me,” she said. “I ought to have rung.”

“Oh, my dear, why?” Mrs. Kingconstance rejoined, good-naturedly, as she settled herself and her bobbins once more. “It is good for me to get up. I sometimes think I sit too long at a time.”

“Very likely,” was the dry rejoinder ; “but that is no excuse for me. I ought to have rung. You were sitting—you had your hands full ; I was standing, with nothing in my hands, and near the bell. No excuse for me. There never was ; there never is.”

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"I can't see why you should have rung, my dear," Mrs. Kingconstance reiterated, comfortably.

"We should always be on the alert to do such things for each other. It is just such trifles that promote the harmony of life."

"Oh, quite so," said Mrs. Kingconstance; then, catching at the word "harmony," "Have you practised to-day?" she asked. "It would be nice if you would play something now."

"No, I cannot. There is no music in me. I am all out of tune."

"Ah, that is the weather," Mrs. Kingconstance observed.

Meanwhile, outside, the wind blew, great drops of rain pattered upon the window-panes at every gust, and the bleak March day threatened to close in rapidly.

Miss Kingconstance had sunk once more into the seat beside the fire, and sat looking up at the leaden sky, with a face as sombre and black as the level, murky, unbroken gray firmament above her.

Mrs. Kingconstance glanced up at the clock.

"Tea-time," she remarked. "I rather expect the vicar, and I want to see him particularly."

"I rather want to see him myself, the Honorable noode."

"Ah, Lorraine, your naughty trick of nicknaming!" said Mrs. Kingconstance. "But we mustn't forget that the vicar is a gentleman, and has feelings to be hurt. It would not do to let him know his nickname, however appropriate."

"No," said Miss Kingconstance; "you are quite right, and I hope you won't mention it to him."

Almost immediately afterwards a servant announced Mr. Worringham, and the vicar entered—an ascetic, benevolent, amiable-looking old gentleman, somewhat precise in manner, but simple and kindly withal.

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Tea was brought in at the same time, and it was hard to say which was the most welcome as a diversion to Mrs. Kingconstance, she smiled so impartially on both.

Miss Kingconstance took no notice of either, and, noting her attitude, the vicar lowered his voice.

"A bad day?" he said, raising his eyebrows interrogatively.

"Threatening," said Mrs. Kingconstance, significantly.

"What's threatening?" Miss Kingconstance broke in, turning round on them unexpectedly.

Both were embarrassed for a moment, then Mr. Worringham said,

"How do you do, Miss Lorraine?"

"How do I do?"

She shrugged her shoulders expressively, then turned again to the fire.

Mrs. Kingconstance flushed.

"I wonder where the children are?" she hastily interposed. "I have not heard them about the whole afternoon. Surely they have not gone out in the wet. You didn't meet them, did you, Mr. Worringham?"

Mr. Worringham had not met them.

"Babs cares nothing for weather," Mrs. Kingconstance pursued, "and really it does not seem to do her any harm. She is not sensitive. But she drags Julia and Montacute after her wherever she goes, and it's no use talking to her. She grows more and more unmanageable every day. Can you advise me, Mr. Worringham? The other children are as good as gold; but I can do nothing with Babs."

"Poor, dear Babs!" Miss Kingconstance murmured, softly.

"Perhaps," Mr. Worringham mildly suggested, "you are not strict enough with Lorraine. I mean—er—that, in fact, when you say she must not do a thing, you

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do not always make her obey. Now Lorraine is clever in her way — she is very clever in her own way, don't you know ; not book clever—I won't say that—but shrewd. I will explain what I mean. Excuse me for being a little personal ; but you are too good-natured, my dear lady, too amiable, and—er—in this case I might almost say too indulgent. It is natural, of course, and it is hard for mothers to do violence to their own feelings, even for the sake of their children ; but then, you see, dear lady, it is your duty."

"Of course I am anxious to do my duty," Mrs. Kingconstance rejoined, sitting up with a self-denying air. "But you were going to explain?"

Mr. Worryingham searched about in his mind for what he had intended to say.

"Told to do a thing and isn't made to do it," Miss Kingconstance prompted, impatiently.

"Ah, yes, yes," he said. "I was going to explain ; of course, of course. When you tell her to do something, you see, you must be sure that she does it. For instance, you say at breakfast, or it may happen that you say—I do not, of course, assert that this has actually occurred ; but something like it may have occurred, or sooner or later exactly this very thing will occur, don't you know. It is just as well to be prepared."

A sense of edification began to irradiate the habitual complacency of Mrs. Kingconstance's comely countenance. But the good vicar had lost the thread of his discourse and come to another full stop.

"'You say at breakfast, for instance,' " Miss Kingconstance prompted again, irritably.

"Er—yes, yes," said the vicar, catching the cue. "You might say, for instance, don't you know, 'Now, Lorraine—or Babs, if you like—you are not to go out this morning.' And an hour afterwards what do you do ? She comes and coaxes, and you yield to her coaxing, and let

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her go—after saying that she mustn't, don't you see? And that is a want of—in fact, a want of firmness. That is where you mothers fail. You want more firmness."

Mrs. Kingconstance set her soft lips, and began to rehearse the part of firm mother with decision. Miss Kingconstance looked at her and smiled derisively.

CHAPTER II

BABS had an idea in her head that afternoon. There was something she wanted to do, and when Babs had an idea, it was generally carried out, for Babs was practical. Grown-up people generally dubbed her ideas unlady-like when they came to know of them ; but Babs recked little of what they thought, the grown-up people. "Mamma is herself and I am myself," she would explain, "and we don't think of the same things. If mamma thought what I think, she'd do what I do. I know she would ; but she doesn't seem to know it herself. I never bother my head about what she thinks and does—it isn't my business—but she's always worrying after me. I wish she wouldn't."

On that particular cold, wet, March afternoon, Babs was heading an expedition. The party consisted of herself and her brother and sister, and just at the time that Mrs. Kingconstance was wondering what had become of the children, Babs was leading them resolutely, single file, down dripping lanes, where the cart-ruts were channelled deep with running water, and along narrow paths across fields of the muddiest. She did not seem to notice the discomfort of the day herself. All weather was pretty much the same to Babs, provided she could evade the authorities and get out. And now, although the wind battered her, and at every gust the drops rained cold upon her from the tall hedgerows and the branches of the trees, she stepped out cheerily, noting with keen interest every object by the way, but never losing sight of her purpose

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for an instant. The demeanor of the other two was very different. The boy, who came last and seemed to be the youngest of the three, although in reality the eldest, struggled along against the wind with bent head, gazing on the ground. His attitude suggested endurance rather than enjoyment. He was a fragile-looking creature, with pale blue eyes, a white face, and colorless fair hair—not made for a life of action, evidently, yet holding his own with dogged determination against the difficulties and discomforts of the moment. Not so with his sister Julia. She and Babs were about the same height, and might have been any age from twelve to sixteen ; but it was impossible to say which was the elder of the two, and no sisters could have been more unlike in appearance. Julia was dark, with black hair, clear brown skin and bright color, and large, bold brown eyes—eyes that met all other eyes directly, and were not to be abashed. She walked stiffly, with her head held high, and an expression of self-esteem on her countenance, which was not pleasant in so young a girl. Indeed, her whole manner was self-assertive, and she gathered her skirts up about her out of the wet in a way which suggested a more coquettish regard for her personal appearance than is usual or desirable at her age. Her determined mouth might have led a casual observer to suppose that she was the one of the three who would take the lead in everything. It was not so, however. While her brother and sister were for open tactics, her influence was bound to be secondary ; but any chance for deflection would put the game into her hands.

Although Babs presented a complete contrast to her sister in appearance, being fair, with fine golden-yellow hair, milk-white skin just tinged with pink, and tender blue eyes, it was the more radical difference of character which betrays itself in the general demeanor, in manner and movement, rather than in form, feature, and coloring,

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the different mode of thought and habit of observation, that made the most striking part of the dissimilarity. As they followed each other down the narrow path, Julia turned her dark eyes vigilantly from right to left, and picked her steps, being careful to avoid the discomfort of getting wet; but the dark eyes noted only unpleasant obstacles to be avoided. She did not see it when the day began to clear and the clouds rolled away in heavy masses, all tinged with burnished copper where the sun's rays struggled to pierce them. Neither did she notice the twitter of birds in the hedgerows, nor the fresh odors that arose from the damp earth, nor the sparkle of crystal drops on bare brown branches. It was simply a nasty, wet afternoon to Julia, and she was very sorry she had allowed herself to be persuaded to come out. Not that she had been persuaded. The other two did not want her much, but she would come—which did not prevent her blaming everybody but herself for the discomfort.

But Babs took no notice of her sister's discontent. She carried a little basket in her hand, and swung her arm as she walked along, in her own careless way, with light, elastic step, splashing her dress with mud and wetting her boots, because everything—the sky, the clouds, the trees, the fields, the birds, the beasts—claimed her attention, everything except the ground at her feet.

When any word was exchanged between the three, it was generally Babs who broke the silence, and it was her brother she addressed as a rule, being sure of his sympathy. Julia was much too busy taking care of herself to notice what the other two said, but once or twice she asked tartly how much farther they had to go, and carped at the invariable answer: "We shall be there directly."

They had not met a soul since they came out until, in a winding lane flanked by high hedges, they came upon a little lady with flaxen ringlets mincing along, holding up her dress with a finger and thumb on either side, and

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pointing her toes to pick her steps, as if she were gliding through the figures of a minuet.

"Here's Twitters," Julia remarked; then, with that rather loud affectation of bluntness which passes with some people for kindly condescension, she called to her:

"How do you do, Miss Spice?"

Miss Spice minuetted up to them with little noddings and gesticulations, shaking her ringlets back and giggling youthfully.

"Oh, my dears, what a day! Well, I'm sure! What *has* brought you all out? Excuse shaking hands; I daren't let go my dress."

"What brought *you* out, Miss Spice?" said Babs.

"Oh, my dears! Aunt Sophia, you know." She dropped her voice mysteriously, and bespoke secrecy with sundry nods and winks. "A little something for tea, you know, to tempt her. Must fetch it. And how is your dear mamma?"

"Oh, she's all right," said Babs.

"And your poor dear Aunt Lorraine?"

"There is nothing the matter with Aunt Lorraine, Miss Spice," Julia rejoined, bridling.

"Oh, my dear; no, of course not," Miss Spice hastened to agree, apologetically. "I am glad she is quite well, as usual. I must hurry off. Aunt's tea. Good-bye! *Good-bye*, dears!"

She picked up her dress on either side, made them a little courtesy, and minuetted off, pointing her toes to cross the mud-puddles elegantly, her flaxen ringlets curling and uncurling at every step like animated main-springs.

"Well, I do call that impertinence!" Julia exclaimed, hardly waiting for Miss Spice to be out of hearing. "'Poor dear Aunt Lorraine,' indeed! As if a fool in our family were not of more consequence than a hero in hers."

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"There you are!" said Babs. "That's the inhumanity of the county again. County people are all for themselves."

"If you don't mind, Babs, you'll end by being a Radical," her brother said, impressively.

"Oh, *I* don't mind," Babs answered, carelessly. "Aunt Lorraine calls the county inhuman, and Aunt Lorraine is not such a fool as some people suppose."

"She's just cracky," said Montacute.

"She may be that, but she's not a fool," Babs obstinately asseverated.

"Then why did she let the burglars out?" Julia demanded.

"I expect she did it for fun," Babs answered, disconcerted, but not to be driven from her loyal defence.

They were climbing down a steep, narrow, rugged path between two coverts, and came in sight of a shallow, unpleasant-looking pond, in which the path apparently ended. The heavy rain had swollen the ditches, and all the low-lying ground at the foot of the hill was under water.

"Oh, Cute, look!" said Babs. "What shall we do?"

She ran down to the water's edge as she spoke. On the other side of the pond a hillock rose abruptly out of the water. It was crowned by a young plantation, and its deep green sides were a mass of white and purple violets, the perfume from which reached the young people where they stood.

Babs stamped.

"Mamma must have them," she said, with decision; but she was baffled.

"So this is your fine mystery?" Julia exclaimed, crossly. "I don't see why you wouldn't tell me."

"We meant to surprise mamma with them," said Montacute.

"What has that to do with it?"

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"Our surprises don't come off, somehow, when you know about them beforehand."

"Do you mean to accuse me of telling?"

"You generally tell," said Babs, still intent upon the violets.

"So I should," said Julia, shifting her ground. "It's sly and deceitful to hide things from mamma."

"What kind of things?" Montacute asked, politely.

"Any kind," Julia snapped.

"Well, you *are* silly," he rejoined.

"Why am I silly?" she demanded.

"Because if your argument makes it deceitful for us to prepare surprises for mamma, it must make it deceitful for mamma to prepare surprises for us. Your logic won't hold water."

"What do *you* know about logic?" Julia jeered.

"Not much, if my acquirements are to be measured by yours," said Montacute.

"I must do it," Babs broke in.

The other two suspended hostilities.

"Do what?" they demanded, speaking together.

"Go across."

"That dirty water!" Julia cried, with disgust.

"If anybody goes across, it shall be me," said the boy.

"No, no," said Babs, decisively.

"I can't let you girls do that sort of thing, you know," he persisted.

"Many boys *make* their sisters do that sort of thing," Babs said, tactfully.

"But I am a gentleman," said the lad.

"I know," said Babs. "You needn't risk a cold to prove it."

"Nonsense about cold," he said, and began to take off his boots.

Both girls caught hold of him.

"You're not going in," they objected.

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"Let go!" he cried, trying vainly to shake them off.

"Not till you promise you won't," said Babs.

"Do promise," said Julia, maliciously. "It does look so absurd to see a boy being held by two girls."

Babs instantly dropped his arm and gave her sister a meaning look, which Julia met derisively. The boy stood still, deeply hurt. He was sensitive on the subject of his delicacy.

"He could shake us off easily enough if he chose," said Babs, abasing herself to pour balm on the wound; "but he's too much of a gentleman to be rough with girls. You'll let me go in, Cute, won't you? I've set my heart on getting the flowers myself."

The boy turned without a word and began to walk back slowly up the steep path by which they had just descended, his interest in everything suddenly extinguished. His delicate health and stunted growth were a grief to him.

Babs looked sorrowfully after him as he went, then turned to her sister.

"I'd say you were a beast, Julia, if the comparison were not an insult to honest animals."

"You are noted for your refinement," Julia retorted.

Babs shrugged her shoulders and peered down into the loathsome-looking water. There might be horse-leeches in it, and there were certainly horrid little animals that turned up their tails like scorpions, and Babs had a fastidious gentlewomanly shrinking from crawling creatures; but even while she hesitated she was tucking up her skirts and preparing to plunge in. She did not go through the form of removing her already wet shoes and stockings.

Julia sat on a stone and watched her, all her interest centred on the anticipation of mishaps. Once Babs slipped on a stone and came down; but she held her countenance calmly impassive, even when the ice-

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cold muddy water came up to her chin, because Julia laughed.

When the violets were gathered she returned to the bank and began to arrange them.

"Do be quick!" said Julia. "We shall never get home."

"What's keeping you?" said Babs.

"I don't wish to go alone."

"Well, I've just done; but I should be quicker if you'd help me."

"I can't do that. I should dirty my hands."

"What harm would that do you?"

"It spoils one's hands so, washing them often."

"Oh, Julia, my dear!" Babs exclaimed, "you'll certainly end by inventing a glass case in which to keep yourself, that the dust may not light upon you. Talk about Aunt Lorraine! When you're an old woman—"

But Babs never finished the phrase, for Julia jumped up, snatched the basket of violets from the ground, and tore off up the hill with it.

Babs made a move to follow her, then stood still.

"I could easily overtake you, my dear," she said to herself; "but what does it matter? Let our accounts accumulate. We'll settle them all together—when it's worth while."

She yawned as she spoke, and began to climb the hill-path slowly, much hampered by her clinging wet clothes.

CHAPTER III

MISS SPICE had gone on, with her warm little heart full of kind consideration for Aunt Sophia's tea. The village shop was her goal, and something tasty and tinned her object. At the same time her little head was busy with a romance she had just been reading, in the costume of the Charles's, when the court was in curls and dames were stately. Miss Spice, holding up her skirts on either side with a finger and thumb, minuetted round a puddle here or pointed a toe across a fairy obstacle there, playing a part as she proceeded in the procession of gallant gentlemen and lovely ladies who were passing in groups across her consciousness, and making of herself the quaintest little figure it is possible to imagine as still lingering at this time of day, even in a country district several decades behind the times.

Miss Spice had been in London once—just once—for a blissful week. She had knelt in St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey and felt religious; had gazed at the Houses of Parliament and felt the importance of officialdom; had gone to the Tower and felt for kings and queens, and to Madame Tussaud's and felt history—combined with horror of the French Revolution and a wicked interest in the dissolute society of courts; she had heard some singers at a Crystal Palace concert, and herself had sung quite in the professional manner ever since; and she had attended Church parade in the Park on Sunday morning, and felt with a thrill what it is to

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be fashionable and worldly. "When I was in London" was the happy epoch from which Miss Spice dated all her experiences of life.

Miss Spice's fluffy, fair flaxen hair curled all over her head and flowed a little way down her back, just as it had done when she was sixteen. She had never thought of arranging her tresses in any other way. Probably, had she done so, remarks would have been made. That is the kind of thing that happens seventeen miles from a railway station. People object to new-fangled notions in such localities. Change is to them a stranger at whom they are ever ready to heave the half-brick. Miss Spice had a pretty little pink and white face, with a pointed chin, and a complexion so delicate that you had to look close in order to discover the lines which told tales about Miss Spice's age. For years had elapsed, alas ! since the golden spring "when I was in London."

Miss Spice was treading a measure, accompanied by the sweet music of her own little voice, managed quite in the professional manner, when on a sudden in the distance she perceived a stranger approaching—a tall, not to say ponderous, gentleman in a black frock-coat, obtrusively white linen, and a silk hat—a costume only seen on Sundays, in the company of the best people, when strangers from London visited that remote region. As they neared each other, Miss Spice became aware of something unusually magnificent about this stranger, something extraordinarily important even in the flap of his coat-tails as they wagged from side to side, and when she came abreast of him Miss Spice involuntarily dropped him a courtesy. She had once before in her life involuntarily dropped such a courtesy to a gentleman, a royal duke, who had passed her at a considerable distance one day when she was in London. Being unaware of the compliment, the royal duke had not acknowledged it ; but this stranger instantly doffed his hat and bowed profoundly. In

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her day-dreams Miss Spice was accustomed to meet the most lordly knights, who always saluted her, and she was not embarrassed ; and, until the stranger bowed, he was a being of that order. The moment afterwards, however, all was altered, and Miss Spice was in such a flutter that she hurried on incontinently. Her imagination also hurried on. If only it had been a fine day ! If only there had been flowers in the hedgerows she might have culled one ! If only she could sprain her ankle, do something—anything—to attract his attention, excite his interest, and claim his assistance !

Little Miss Spice looked round, and just at that moment the stranger also turned—turned back—and his hat was again in his hand. Miss Spice awaited his coming of necessity, for she was paralyzed. The stranger's step was leisurely, as became the dignity of his portly presence ; it seemed to Miss Spice an age till he reached her. She watched his coming like a fascinated bird ; but Miss Spice was a happy little bird. The dream of her life was about to be accomplished.

"Er—pardon me, madam," were the very first words the distinguished-looking stranger said to Miss Spice ; and she never forgot that "Certainly" was all she answered.

"Perhaps, madam," said the distinguished-looking stranger—and each word took on a special importance from the impressive way in which he pronounced it—"perhaps, madam, you can tell me, is this the way to the village of Danehurst ?" and he made a grand gesture which included the whole landscape behind him.

"No, sir," said Miss Spice, rising to the occasion ; "*this* is the way to the village of Danehurst," and she gracefully waved her little hand in the opposite direction. "I am going there myself," she continued, extending her skirts to a courtesy, "and I will show you the way if you like."

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"Thank you, thank you," said the stranger, and again he raised his hat and bowed politely. "You are not a native of these parts, I feel sure," was his next remark as they walked on together.

Miss Spice perked as at a compliment. She was bobbing along with the portly stranger like a tiny boat beside a man-of-war.

"Oh yes, I am," she twittered; "very much a native of these parts."

"Ah, then you have travelled," he observed. "I feel sure you have travelled."

"What makes you think so?" said Miss Spice, much pleased.

"Well—er—it is hard to define, if I may say so. A something—a *nuance*, my dear young lady, and *voilà tout*!"

"Oh yes, to be sure," said Miss Spice.

"I suppose you know everybody in the neighborhood?" the stranger proceeded.

"Well, pretty nearly," Miss Spice acknowledged, modestly. "It is a little place, you know, seventeen miles from a railway station."

"I know," he replied. "The great charm of the place to me consists in the fact that it is seventeen miles from a railway station. In such places the homely virtues flourish and people are thrown upon each other for society. That is why I am here. But doubtless you had heard of my arrival?"

"No," gasped Miss Spice, breathlessly. "Have you come to stay?"

"Yes"—he paused—"if I can find a suitable residence."

"Oh!" said Miss Spice.

"Yes"—he paused again, then added, impressively, "My name is Tinney."

Miss Spice's heart contracted—"Tinney!"

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"Capel Augustus Jellybond Tinney," the stranger proceeded, and as he unrolled the syllables Miss Spice's heart expanded again. "Jellybond Tinney," the stranger repeated.

"Hyphened?" Miss Spice ventured, in some excitement. A hyphened name she conceived to be highly aristocratic.

"Er—oh no, quite simple," said the stranger, and Miss Spice knew by the way in which he said it that this was a credit to him. "Jellybond was my mother's name. Tinney my father's. My mother brought the blood; birth and beauty were hers. My father—well, I always say of my father he was Tinney by name and Tinney by—er—banking account."

Miss Spice uttered a little exclamation, so surprising to her was this conclusion.

He looked at her out of the corner of his eyes, and smiled complacently.

"I always put the saying so," he explained. "It has, you see, in that form the charm of the unexpected. You should always avoid the obvious."

"Should I?" said Miss Spice.

"We should," he corrected.

"Oh, indeed," said Miss Spice.

Then there was another pause.

"I am not always *called* Tinney, however," the stranger recommenced. "I am known elsewhere by another designation—"

"A title?" Miss Spice gasped.

"Well, er—really—you quite embarrass me." His smile spoke volumes. "But I cannot explain—" He broke off. "Suffice it for you and me that for the present I prefer to be called plain 'Mister'—'Mister Jellybond.' For convenience I sometimes drop the 'Tinney.'"

"Noble, sir, I'm sure," Miss Spice exclaimed, not in the least knowing what she meant; and she ever afterwards averred that the words were forced from her.

The distinguished-looking stranger pressed his hand out flat over his heart, and focussed his eyes afar off. Then he sighed and muttered "Strange!"

"I beg your pardon?" said Miss Spice.

"I was just thinking," he rejoined, with another deep sigh. "I was wondering. Is it not singular that I should be talking to you thus?—confiding in you? How wonderful is the law of affinity! Half an hour ago we had not met, and now you know my secret."

"Sir," said Miss Spice, "your secret is safe in my keeping."

"Safe indeed!" he ejaculated.

After they had walked on together in silence for a little, he remarked:

"I am staying at present at the village inn—in some discomfort. Do you happen to know of a house to be let in the neighborhood, if I may ask?—a suitable residence?"

"Yes, sir, I do," said Miss Spice—"at least I don't know—I mean I know of a house, but whether it would be suitable or not—"

"Oh, as to that, of course, I must myself decide," the stranger concluded, genially. "Where is the house, and to whom may it belong? Is it to be let or sold?"

"This house is called a 'cottage'—the 'Swiss Cottage'—although it is quite a fine residence," Miss Spice responded with a readiness that surprised her. "It is hidden among the fir-trees on the hill-side at the farther end of the village—the farther end from *my* end. My—er—house is the Cross Roads Cottage. All the houses here that are not halls, courts, or castles, are cottages. We have no villas."

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Jellybond. "Now that is significant."

"Yes," said Miss Spice, much puzzled, for she could not conceive what was signified.

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"And this Swiss Cottage belongs to whom?" said Mr. Jellybond.

"Oh yes, I forgot," Miss Spice hastened to add. "It belongs to Squire Normanton, of Normanton Hall, and is to be let or sold."

Mr Jellybond's face was impassive.

"I suppose," he said, "you know this Squire Normanton?"

"Well, yes," Miss Spice replied, with some little hesitation; "yes, I do," she added, firmly, as if she had just made up her mind.

"I asked," said the stranger, "because I should want an introduction; an introduction simplifies things so much—don't you think so? Not a formal introduction, you know, just a card, and written on it in your own hand—of course it must be in your own hand—'To introduce Mr. Jellybond.' But I hardly like to trouble you."

"No trouble, I'm sure," said Miss Spice in great confusion. "But—"

She had never been asked to do such a thing before, and she had no visiting-cards.

Mr. Jellybond interrupted with a dignified gesture.

"I should, of course, myself explain the extent of our acquaintance," he said, "when the ice is broken. If you would be so sweet as to break the ice!"

"Oh, certainly—of course," twittered Miss Spice. "But I was going to say—not the squire. He"—she tittered a little and blushed—"he never seems to see that I have grown up. He treats me like a little girl. I would rather, if you don't mind, the vicar, Mr. Worringham—the Honorable. If you knew him he would introduce everybody."

"Ah, thank you," said Mr. Jellybond. "But first in the village I will pay my respects to yourself, dear lady, at—er—the Cross Roads Cottage, if I may. Shall we say to-morrow morning?"

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"Delighted!" was all Miss Spice could articulate.

"I shall look forward to it," Mr. Jellybond said, impressively. "I shall look forward to discussing many things with you, including the Swiss Cottage, and—er—an introduction. What a sweet spot this is! I can scarcely believe that I have at last reached such a peaceful haven, after all I have gone through; but it is a long lane, my dear young lady, that—er—keeps on turning."

But they were just entering the village, and on a sudden Miss Spice found herself all in a twitter of embarrassment because she did not know how she was to do such a common thing as to get herself into "the shop" before the distinguished-looking stranger. If only the church had been open she would have entered and breathed a prayer; but the church never was open except for regular services. It was most provoking. Miss Spice cast about in her mind for something else of an elevated nature that she might mention as an excuse. A visit to a sick person would have done admirably, but, alas! there was no sick person in the village that she knew of—and here they were close to "the shop."

"This is the village of Danehurst, sir," she exclaimed, desperately.

"Yes," he said; "now I know where I am." He surveyed the place. "A delicious spot!" was his verdict. "And this is the principal emporium, I suppose?" he added, indicating "the shop" in his grand way. "Do you do your shopping here?"

"Yes," said Miss Spice, and again it seemed to her that the words were forced from her, so that she assured herself it was fate. "That reminds me; I have an order to give."

"Ah! Eve on household cares intent," said Mr. Jellybond. "Well, good-bye, my dear young lady, and many thanks for your kind guidance. We shall meet again if all goes well—if not here, then in the far beyond."

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He raised his hat high, and passed on up the street, and again Miss Spice observed the way his coat-tails waggled—so expressively—you could see at a glance he was somebody. She cast but one long, yearning look after him, and then she minuetted into “the shop,” and would have sunk down into a chair, only that the chairs were so high she had rather to rise than to sink in order to reach the seat. Having done so, she sat with her feet dangling at some little distance from the floor, and tried to collect her thoughts; but so overcome was she with consciousness of the occasion, of fate—of everything—that when the shopman came to serve her she could hardly articulate, “Two fresh eggs, if you please, and a slice of ham.”

CHAPTER IV

MISS KINGCONSTANCE left her sister-in-law alone with Mr. Worringham, and sauntered up to her own room. The weather was clearing ; she thought she would dress and go out. She put her hand on the bell to ring for her maid, then changed her mind. Why disturb the woman ? Why did she keep a maid at all ? It would be much better for her to do everything for herself.

She began to pull things out of her wardrobe. A cloak ? No, she hated cloaks. The cloak was tossed aside. A blue ulster ? That was dowdy, and why should she be dowdy ? The ulster followed the cloak. A buff jacket ? That was not so bad. She put it on, tied some white tulle round her neck, and completed the costume with new gloves and a Paris hat. Then she looked at herself in a mirror critically. She was certainly very well dressed, but she was not satisfied.

" Could anything be more ridiculous ? " she said to herself, contemptuously, holding up her skirt so as to display her silk petticoat and French boots. " Could anything be more ridiculous than such a costume for these country roads ? "

She went to the window, opened it, and looked out. Everything smelled fresh and sweet after the rain, and the air was reviving, but the prospect did not enliven her. Below there was nothing to be seen but the drive, and a monotonous, park-like expanse of green grass, garnished with great bare trees ; while, above, the sombre

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masses of heavy gray clouds, luridly tinged at the edges with flecks of flame-color from the sunset, oppressed her, like things of ominous import.

Where should she go? Walking for walking's sake is poor amusement; it is as insipid as eating without appetite. Should she go and see some one?—Fanny Sturdy, Florence Japp, Ally Spice, Mrs. Normanton, Lady May? No, thank you. Bores, all; not one of them could take her out of herself. There was no one she cared to see, nowhere she wanted to go, and she had nothing to do.

She took a few irresolute steps about the room, then rang the bell imperatively. Her maid came hurrying up.

"Order the horses," she said, "and then come and help me into my habit. It's just the day for a ride."

When she went down - stairs, an obsequious servant opened the hall door for her. The horses were waiting. She stood a moment on the steps, looking about her, then mounted, and cantered down the drive, followed by her groom. The old trees showered drops upon her, the fresh air fanned her face, her horse stepped gayly; but she herself remained unexhilarated, her face colorless and impassive, her whole attitude that of one engaged in an uncongenial pursuit. The purposelessness of the ride affected her, as the purposelessness of the contemplated walk had done; and it was not long before she turned her horse round with an irritable jerk and cantered home.

"I cannot stand the damp," she said to her groom, as he helped her to dismount, feeling that she must excuse her sudden change of mind.

The same servant opened the door for her, and as she passed in she had an uncomfortable impression that he exchanged meaning glances with another footman who was loitering in the hall. Doubtless they had noticed her indecision and thought it irrational. She stopped,

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seized with an undignified desire to account to them also for her changeableness; but she restrained herself. Before she reached her room, however, her morbid self-consciousness was again tormenting her—this time with the dread of being discussed; and she looked into the hall from the gallery, expecting to see the servants talking together. But one of them had disappeared and the other was tranquilly reading a newspaper.

As her maid helped her to change her habit, Miss Kingconstance was careful to explain that she had returned so soon because of the damp, which affected her unpleasantly.

Soon after the woman had gone, Miss Kingconstance heard voices outside in the corridor. Two maids had met there, and stood chatting a moment. Involuntarily Miss Kingconstance listened.

“Is your name Susannah May?” one said.

“Yes. Have you more than one name?”

“No, nothing but Bertha.”

“Well, I don’t know as it isn’t enough. Mrs. Kingconstance has got four names, and they call her Belle, so what do they all amount to? Miss Kingconstance’s name is pretty—Lorraine.”

“So is Miss Kingconstance, don’t you think?”

“Oh yes, she is pretty—and yet not pretty exactly; more elegant. And, my! can’t she dress! Everything she gets becomes her, and it’s all good.”

“I should think so! She spends enough on her dress to keep a whole family.”

“Oh, my! it’s good to be her! How do you like my hair like this?”

“I think it suits you. It’s your day out to-morrow, isn’t it?”

“Yes, and I sha’n’t sleep all night for thinking about it. I’m going to see mother.”

Miss Kingconstance stood in the middle of the room,

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reflecting, long after the maids had gone their several ways. She saw herself in a mirror—"pretty," "elegant"—yes, but what was the use of being so? Those little servants were better off than she was; they had something to look forward to.

When Babs returned that evening from the raid upon the violets, the first person she encountered was her aunt Lorraine, loitering in a corridor up-stairs, as if she were waiting for her. Babs came up, walking nonchalantly in her muddy, wet clothes, humming an air, and swinging her arm in time to it, as if she were conducting a band. She was always energetic, always in a whirl, always putting passionate interest into something, but, unfortunately, not often twice into the same thing. She was inconsequent; she lacked continuity, and did not cultivate it; she followed one pursuit after another, and dropped each in turn with casual unconcern. The days of her life were like the pages of a book which are read once with interest, then turned, and never looked at again. She owed her nickname to her aunt Lorraine, who used to call to her "Babs! Babs the Impossible!" when she caught her doing anything hoydenish. Then other people had begun to call her "Babs" also, until by degrees everybody had adopted the name, as odd names are often adopted, not for their aptness, but for their incongruity, and also, in the case of Babs, to prevent confusion, since aunt and niece were both Lorraine.

"Oh, Babs!" Miss Kingconstance exclaimed. "Look at you! Another dress ruined! What excuse can you make for yourself, coming home in such a state?"

"I should say I was picturesque," said Babs, setting her arms akimbo and surveying herself in a mirror.

"I don't wonder your mother is worried about you," Miss Kingconstance pursued, "and I hope she'll carry out her intention."

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"What intention, if you please?" said Babs, defiantly.

"Her intention to be firm with you."

"Who put that into her head?" Babs asked.

"Mr. Worringham, my dear. Your mother consulted him this afternoon, and he advised her to be firm."

"Oh!" said Babs. "So mamma consulted Mr. Worringham about me, and he advised her to be firm? How is she going to be firm?"

"Well, when she says you are to do a thing, she's going to make you do it; and when she says that you are not to do a thing, she's going to see that you don't do it."

"Oh, indeed!" said Babs. "She's quite made up her mind, I suppose?"

"Yes, quite."

Babs reflected for a moment, then she whirled round.

"I'd better go and have it out with her at once!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, Babs!" Miss Kingconstance began, in a tone of remonstrance; but Babs was already half-way downstairs.

"Don't be afraid," she called back. "I sha'n't give you away."

Mrs. Kingconstance had gone to get ready for dinner. She was in her dressing-room, sitting in a comfortable chair in front of a duchesse dressing-table, having her beautiful black hair arranged by her maid. She sat with her white hands folded and a complacent smile on her face, called forth by the comely reflection of herself in the long mirror. Her peignoir of pale purple silk suited her to perfection, and she had just been struck by the fact, and was enjoying it, when Babs, all bedraggled and dirty, burst in upon her with a tragic face—the which, when Mrs. Kingconstance saw it reflected in the mirror, banished her own complacent smile and caused her to look round apprehensively.

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"What is the matter, Babs?" she cried. "What has happened?"

"Send Norton away. I want to speak to you alone," Babs answered, imperatively.

Mrs. Kingconstance nodded to the maid, who withdrew.

"Now, mother," said Babs, taking up her position beside the dressing-table so as to face her mother—"now, mother, what's the meaning of this nonsense?"

"My dear child, what nonsense?" Mrs. Kingconstance demanded.

"This nonsense about being firm with me. I hear that you have publicly announced your intention of being firm with me. What do you mean by it?"

"Babs, is that the way to speak to your mother?" Mrs. Kingconstance remonstrated, plaintively.

"Well, mother, I want to know," Babs answered, in the tone of one who concedes a point. "Will you be so good as to explain? I don't understand your proceeding this afternoon at all. You call in an outsider, and then you make complaints about me. How would you like it if I did such a thing? It's not loyal."

"My dear child, I make complaints?"

"What do you call it, then? Did you praise me?" Mrs. Kingconstance looked uncomfortable. "You know you did not," Babs pursued; "you sent for old Worringham—"

"My dear child, *Mr.* Worringham."

"Well, never mind," said Babs, waiving that point also, as too trivial to dispute. "Mr. Worringham, if you like, or the Honorable and Reverend Wilfred Wyndham Worringham, if you prefer it. That does not alter the matter. You sent for him and you abused me. Now, I ask you, was that a nice thing to do?"

"Well, I ask you, Babs," said Mrs. Kingconstance, weakly descending to argument, "is it nice of you to be

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so difficult ? You give me more trouble than any one or anything else in the world. What am I to do with you ? Look at the state you are in now ! Julia came in not long ago, neat and nice as possible, and she said she had been out with you this afternoon gathering violets. If she could keep herself clean, why can't you ?

"What did she do with the violets, by-the-way," said Babs.

"She put them on my table in a basket, beautifully arranged. She knows how I appreciate such little attentions from my children."

"She does !" said Babs, and burst out laughing irrelevantly.

Mrs. Kingconstance stared at her.

"Babs," she said, solemnly, "if you don't mind, I'm afraid you'll end like your poor, dear aunt."

"She hasn't ended yet," said Babs ; "but that's not the point—neither are the violets. I'm glad you liked them, though. I came to remonstrate with you for discussing our private family affairs with strangers."

"Mr. Worringham is *not* a stranger, and he *is* a clergyman," Mrs. Kingconstance put in.

"It doesn't matter," said Babs. "He's no relation of ours, and I object to be discussed with him. If you think you ought to be firmer with me, do for goodness sake be firmer ; but don't announce your intention to the whole neighborhood. If parents run up a flag and fire a gun every time they have difficulties to settle with their children, there'll be a Chinese New Year in the neighborhood every day, and *I* shall be blamed for it. And as to being firm with me ! You can't be firm with me, you know. It's perfectly absurd to think of such a thing. I'm here to have a good time, and you can't prevent me. You know you can't—you know you can't," she reiterated, passionately.

"My dear child, I don't want to prevent you. The

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better time you have the better I shall be pleased, only—”

“Ah ! now you speak in a motherly way,” said Babs ;
“ but don’t go and spoil it all with your ‘ only.’ ”

Mrs. Kingconstance looked about her helplessly.

“ I shall be late for dinner ! ” she ejaculated.

“ Well, I won’t detain you a moment longer if you’ll promise me—”

“ Promise what ? ” Mrs. Kingconstance interjected, apprehensively.

“ Promise not to go consulting people about me again. I won’t have it.”

“ Babs,” said Mrs. Kingconstance, with dignity, “ you must not speak to your mother like that.”

“ Well, I won’t have it,” Babs repeated, obstinately.

“ How are you going to prevent it ? ” her mother asked, sarcastically.

“ If you go and consult people about me and make complaints of me, I shall do the same about you, and then you’ll just see how you like it yourself.”

Mrs. Kingconstance was silenced.

“ Will you promise ? ” Babs asked.

“ Oh, Babs ! ” Mrs. Kingconstance complained, “ you ought to consider your mother more, I think. You ought to try to be more of a comfort to me.”

“ A comfort to you ! Why, what comfort are you to me ? ” said Babs.

Mrs. Kingconstance sighed.

“ I feel quite upset,” she said.

“ So do I,” said Babs. “ I shall be obliged to go to my own room directly to recover. I shall stay there the whole evening. I can’t eat anything.”

“ But, my dear child, you must have something to eat.”

“ No, I shall not,” said Babs.

Mrs. Kingconstance reflected.

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"Look here, Babs," she said, at last, "will you promise to be a good girl, and not do impossible things?"

"That's just what I'm asking you," said Babs, vivaciously. "If you will promise not to complain of me again, and not to talk ridiculous nonsense about being firm, I'll see what I can do. You're a nice mamma, and a pretty mamma, and a young mamma; why aren't you a kind, good mamma?"

"Oh, Babs!" said Mrs. Kingconstance, glancing at herself in the mirror and melting into a smile. "You can't call me unkind!"

"Well, was it kind of you to complain of me?"

"I meant it for the best, but perhaps it was not very wise," Mrs. Kingconstance weakly conceded.

"That's just it; it wasn't at all wise," said Babs; "so promise not to do it again." She took up her mother's hair in both hands and bathed her face in it. "What beautiful hair! And it does smell so sweet! Will you promise?"

"Dear child, of course. Look at the clock, Babs. Everything will be spoiled."

"No fear," said Babs. "Don't forget you've promised. Now I'm off. Norton, you can come back."

"Babs! Babs! You'll come down and have something to eat?" Mrs. Kingconstance called, after all.

"I shall *lie* down, and not have *anything* to eat," Babs asseverated.

On the way up-stairs she met her brother coming down dressed.

"Oh, Babs!" he exclaimed. "Not dressed yet? You'll be late. What have you been doing?"

"Reasoning with mamma. It seems she's got some tick in her head about being firm with me. If she began to be firm with me, what would become of us?"

"We shouldn't have our own way in anything!" he ejaculated.

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"No. That's just it. And she'd be laying up much misery for herself too. She couldn't be firm. It isn't in her. A duck might as well determine to cackle, or a hen to quack."

"Did you tell her so?"

"No. I didn't think of it at the moment. Besides, I didn't tackle her so much on that score. What vexed me most was her sending for Mr. Worringham to consult him about me."

"Did she do that?"

"Yes ; but I made her promise she'd never do such a thing again. We won't be given away like that to outsiders, Cute."

"I should think not, indeed ! But, I say, Babs, she won't keep her word."

"She will while she remembers."

"But when she forgets?"

"We'll just have to pull her up again."

"Julia's been invited to dinner to-night," he informed her, "so we'll have the school-room to ourselves."

"We've much to be thankful for !" Babs ejaculated—"at least, you have. I'm not coming down."

"Why not?"

"Business."

He grinned intelligently and ran on.

CHAPTER V

CADENHOUSE had been away in the East for a while, and had just returned. He went without leave-taking—none knew for how long—and came again without warning. In his absence all had been ordered in his household and on his property as though he had gone only for the day. The tower alone had been close shut and locked and barred, and at night there had been darkness where the wonderful opaline light was wont to shine from the topmost stage and far out to sea when Cadenhouse was at home.

A curious thing happened to him the first night he spent in the tower on his return. He was sitting there alone, not in the topmost story, but in the lower stage. It had been pouring hard all day, but the night had cleared, the crescent moon shone in a cobalt sky, and a few big stars burned brightly. Cadenhouse looked up at the quiet stars. He had a book on his knee, but his thoughts were wandering. He felt those worlds a weary way off just then. There were times when they seemed quite close, but that night he was more in touch with our planet. His earthly ears were open to earthly matters, strive as he would to close them. He heard the incessant murmur of the forest below, sea-like, and the separate sighing of the great trees when the fitful gusts disturbed them. An owl hooted, a startled bird twittered its remonstrances, in the distance a cock crowed at intervals, and a fox barked on a sudden near at hand. They were all old, accustomed sounds—he had heard them again

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and again—yet just for that very reason, and because of other days, they came to him with the significance of manifold association, and made him feel for the moment his own aloofness. He glanced at his book, and read : “ For the very fact of bliss implies duality.” And he was alone. He entertained this sensation for a moment, then thrust it aside, and read again : “ All things are made of the Divine Substance, which is the Divine Idea, and matter is spirit made manifest by motion.” As he finished the phrase he found himself thinking of an odd episode in his life—a night visit he had paid to a place of entertainment in London. It had happened years before, and he had scarcely thought of the scene since, but the recollection of it recurred to him now, suddenly, and with singular vividness. He tried to banish it, but it persisted. He saw it as a scene that is being enacted, and it was as if he were both looking on and taking part in it. “ How is this ? ” he wondered. “ Where am I ? ” The recollection went out like a flash. Cadenhouse returned to his book ; but the same thing happened again. It was a note-book he had been studying, full of miscellaneous jottings. This time his eye lighted on the words : “ The survival for an indefinite period of the images of events occurring on the earth in the astral light, or memory of the planet, called the *anima mundi*, which images can be evoked and beheld.” He tried to reflect upon this, but found himself thinking instead of a tall, stout, bearded man in a linen jacket. Where had he seen that man ? His face was familiar. However, what was the use of asking ? He wanted to read, not to rake up old associations. But of course he remembered. There was the whole scene—lights flaring on a crowd of men and women, and, above all, conspicuous, the tall, stout, bearded man.

Cadenhouse made a last desperate effort to concentrate his attention upon his book. In vain. The tall, stout

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man appeared upon every page, until at last, being fain to comprehend, Cadenhouse resigned himself, set his mortal eyes on the night sky, and released his spirit. In a moment the whole episode, with the tall, stout man for its centre, reconstructed itself, and Cadenhouse was living it over again.

He had been at his club in London one night with another young fellow, Jeffrey Wylde, of Wyldeholme, a neighboring land-owner who had also inherited his property early. They were both of them in the first flush of possession and of early manhood, and the big cities claimed them, luring them to enlightenment or to destruction, as the case might be. They had known each other all their lives. Similar interests and near neighborhood had made a certain intimacy habitual, and they had the kind of liking for each other that comes of the position; but they were too dissimilar to allow of their being sympathetic friends. Just at that time Jeffrey Wylde was for doing, while Cadenhouse was for seeing everything.

They had met by chance and dined together, and it had become a question of what to do next.

"Come and see Binks," said Jeffrey.

"Who is Binks?" Cadenhouse asked.

"Oh, a droll chap who has made a fortune by mixing drinks. He swears that the drinks are original concoctions of his own, not to be had elsewhere. The whole show consists in seeing him mix the drinks and listening to his 'patter.' He tosses the drinks from one glass to another over his head without spilling a drop, and talks all the time. Lots of fellows go to draw him, but they don't get much small change out of old Binks. He's well worth seeing. Will you come?"

Cadenhouse assented.

They sauntered out into the street in the leisurely way men move when it is the habit of their lives to have time

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and money always at their disposal. People glancing at them saw two ordinary good-looking young Englishmen of the upper class, with nothing exceptional discernible about either of them. Jeffrey Wylde was the finer animal of the two—somewhat short, but clear of skin and bright of eye, an attractive specimen of youth and health and strength; but Cadenhouse was the more refined, the more distinguished-looking. You would have mistaken Wylde for an affluent, intelligent young military man, but you would have suspected that Cadenhouse was more than that—a somebody capable of something.

It was the height of the summer season, and the streets were crammed. The young men got into a hansom, and sat looking out at the throng, Jeffrey just seeing the surface with interest, Cadenhouse seeing beneath and suffering. That was rather the trend of his nature; the sorrow was more patent to him than the joy of life. A beautiful, gentle-looking girl passed in a carriage, sitting beside a hard, cruel, worldly faced mother. Jeffrey saw only the beauty of the girl, which pleased him; Cadenhouse saw the mother also, and was filled with compassion.

They pulled up in a glare of light outside a severely simple building, somewhat ecclesiastical in design, which stood in a conspicuous position at the corner of two mean streets. Cornermen hung about outside, waiting hungrily for something to turn up—a job that meant money, or a chance tip that meant drink, that meant suspension of the consciousness of misery. The traffic swirled about the corner. On the pavement people jostled each other, dodged each other to avoid collisions, hurried, scurried—gentlemen in evening-dress, with ladies on their arms, in satin shoes and silken wraps, looking for their carriages and cabs; working women with babies and baskets; boys fighting, playing, disputing, getting in everybody's way; artisans—an endless

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stream, coming from four different directions, and meeting and blocking each other's passage at the corner, where the policeman stood, while in the roadway, all in a golden haze, was a block of vehicles—lumbering omnibuses, cabs and carts, dainty broughams, landaus, and victorias—with suffering horses whipped forward, jerked back, pulled this way and that—sinless, silent victims of man's brutality and man's mistakes. The bustle, the racket, the confusion, the smell of horses, human beings, meat, fish, fruit, flowers, stale vegetables, and tobacco, the moving lights and shadows, the constant collisions, kept every sense strained to distraction. There was no more visible sign of law in that chaos than there is in the lives of men, and it was wonderful to think that there was order in it nevertheless, the order educed from every one's intention, by which all were being extricated from the mass, and sent their several ways without intermission, and, for the most part, in safety.

Jeffrey led the way, pushing forward across the pavement into the building. They passed from an ante-room hung with crimson, and embellished with huge palms and plaster statues, into a large hall supported by pillars, and crowded with people sitting about small tables. The first whiff of hot air in the place, reeking with spirits and tobacco, was overpowering. At the far end of the hall an arrangement of lights high up on the wall flashed forth at intervals the legend, in different colors each time:

"BINKS'S PRISMATIC SOUL-REVIVERS !

"1s EACH."

Beneath this shining device there was a solid platform, and on the platform was a counter. Behind it stood a tall, stout, bearded man, with a burnished goblet in either hand. From the goblets there issued upward a luminous liquid arc, tinted like a rainbow.

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"That's Binks," said Jeffrey. "Just watch him. He's a wonderful fellow. He's got the whole concern together—built the place (he was his own architect), and runs it himself. When he started, his whole stock-in-trade was that knack of mixing drinks. He began as a barman, and men used to order drinks just to see him mix them. They do that kind of thing in America, I believe, but here it was a novelty, and naturally fellows took to tipping him; and being a man of marked character, with an object in view, he hoarded all he got. He was determined to set up for himself, and he's done it."

They made their way among the little tables where men and women, some of them extremely well dressed, were sitting with drinks before them. Business was just at its height, and Mr. Binks was working off orders with the rapidity and precision of a machine. They secured a table quite close to the platform, and sat down. All about them, at the other tables, were young men in evening-dress—a whole school of them sitting under Binks as an instructor, waiting to pick up crumbs of wit, slang, and catch-words with which to eke out their own scanty supply. Not that they were extravagant in these things; one word among them eccentrically applied served the whole set for a season. Just at that time everything was "weird." There were no ladies at those tables. Cadenhoe commented on the fact, and asked if betting took the place of beauty.

"No," said Jeffrey; "Binks won't have either here. It's a fad of his. He says he'll have no corruption of youth in his establishment. Parents and guardians may trust him."

"BINKS'S PRISMATIC SOUL-REVIVERS !

"1s EACH"

flashed red on the assembly while Jeffrey was speaking. Waiters in white jackets dashed about incessantly, car-

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rying trays. There were steps on either side of the platform, up and down which they ran incessantly. Mr. Binks, also in a white jacket, tossed the drinks without intermission. Many of the people sat staring at him as if fascinated. When the fluid ascended, shining iridescent in the gaudy lights, their eyes followed the arc it described with constant interest. They looked like worshippers of light and liquid in the early stages of ecstasy.

Jeffrey ordered drinks. They were cool and delicious, but of unsuspected potency.

Closing time was at hand. The people at the farther end of the hall began to disperse, but the young men near the platform sat on. Mr. Binks glanced at the clock, and his efforts relaxed. All this time he had been too busy to hold forth.

"Should think your arms ached, Binks," said one of the youths.

"They would with your stamina, sir, but I've good blood in me," was the rejoinder, rolled out in a large, deep, precise way, as if the speaker were more accustomed to pulpits than to gin-palaces. It was not a common voice, but a careful one, the voice of a man who had conquered commonness by cultivation.

Cadenhouse looked at him with more interest after he had spoken. A waiter came with an order. Binks glanced again at the clock.

"Closing time, gentlemen," he gave out, impressively.

Then he handed the empty mugs he was holding in his hands to an attendant acolyte, and sat down on a large carved-oak chair that stood behind him.

"I say, just one more, Binks," pleaded a clear voice from among the youths.

"Not another to-night, Sir Clarence," Binks replied.

"I know the police, and the police know me. I might have the lights up all night; they'll never come to see if I am serving drinks after hours. I've made my money

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by keeping the law, not by breaking it. I recommend you to take note. Be what you're supposed to be—it doesn't matter what it is. If you're a publican, be a publican; if you're a gentleman, be a gentleman; and in either case be honest and mind your own business. Don't just call yourself what you want to appear to be—find out what's expected of you in that state of life, and do it. Pretending's no good, and putting on the manner to one person and dropping it to another—if it's only a servant—is no good. You've got to be the thing right through, if you mean to succeed. When you're a gentleman, I say, be a gentleman; raise your hat and make your bow—ladies first—*noblesse oblige*—and all the rest of it. When you're a barman, be a barman; slop the beer about and slap the money down."

He had risen and was holding forth with suitable gesticulation, but stopped abruptly while in the act of emphasizing the last phrase with a sounding slap, and stared intently at Cadenhouse.

"Struck all of a heap, Binks?" a sallow youth asked, in a jeering tone.

Binks slowly descended from the platform, and stood with his back against it, facing the groups of young men. They all turned to him, forming a semicircle round him.

"I'm struck by a likeness, sir," he said to Cadenhouse, by way of apology for staring at him. "You and your gentleman friend there both remind me of the dead and gone—of a hall in a hollow and a tower on a hill."

"Hullo! old Binks is poetic!" said a shrill-voiced youth.

"Shut up," a companion remonstrated, with a kick under the table. He wanted to hear what was going on.

The gaudy device above flashed green. Sudden seriousness settled on the group. Each man looked at his neighbor, and saw a sunken face the color of death. The muffled roar of the traffic without penetrated to their

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ears. It was like the sound of the sea—continuous, insistent—the articulate murmur of eternity. The light flashed white. The sea-like sound subsided to an undertone, and then went out ; and Cadenhouse heard only the breeze among the branches playing a soft accompaniment to the mellow notes of a nightingale. Laying hold of the idea, he was wrenched from his reverie, and found himself sitting alone in his old gray tower, with his eyes on the crescent moon.

CHAPTER VI

CADENHOUSE'S first thought when he came to himself was of the month—that it was March, and the nightingales had not arrived. Then whence those mellow notes? The impression of them was still distinct in his mind; but it was as if his ears shut when his eyes opened, so that the sound was blotted out. And it was the same with the recollection of that bygone adventure. He tried hard to recall what had happened after the light flashed green, but his memory was a blank. He could not recollect how the evening had ended, nor how he got himself away from Mr. Binks and his party, nor what became of Jeffrey.

As he was concentrating himself upon the effort to recall the scene, he became aware of an unusual commotion in the tower. At first he thought it was a bird that had got in and was fluttering on the staircase. Then he thought it more like the rustle of drapery. Then all at once it was a footstep—a stealthy step, and hesitating. Some one was in the tower, though how any one could have got in was the puzzle, for Cadenhouse went to and fro by an underground passage, so that the outer door was seldom opened.

He took a lamp from the table and went to the head of the stairs.

“Who’s there?” he asked, peering down into the dark depth.

All was still for the moment. Then light footsteps

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sounded on the steep stone staircase—hesitating footsteps, as of one who comes up reluctantly.

“Who is there?” Lord Cadenhouse repeated.

There was no answer; but presently out of the darkness, upraised to him, there emerged the face of an angel. His heart stood still. It had always been his dream to see just such a face; and now, in the midnight, in the stillness, there it was at last, with earnest eyes upraised.

But the eyes were not saintly eyes at all, as he soon discovered when they were more level with his own. He thought them anything but saintly when he came to examine them, and the face expressed none of the serenity ordinarily associated with the idea of angel visitants. On the contrary, it was a hot, red, embarrassed face, half-laughing, half-defiant—the face of one caught in the act.

“To what do I owe this honor, madam?” Cadenhouse was beginning, formally, when his visitor reached the little stone stage which formed the landing where he stood. But he backed into the room behind him as he spoke, holding the lamp aloft to light the way, for there was scarcely room for two people to stand together outside.

“To a variety of causes, *sir*,” said Babs, recovering herself. “Curiosity first, to be perfectly accurate. I just ached to know about that light of yours. I was taken that way suddenly, and I should have *burst* if I hadn’t come to see for myself.”

They were in the lower stage of the tower, a large apartment, full of a heterogeneous collection of things—books, art treasures, anatomical specimens, scientific instruments.

Babs glanced round with interest; then she looked up at Cadenhouse. Now that they were face to face she was much the less abashed of the two, for Cadenhouse was a grave, silent man, given to reading and reflection,

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and more apt to commune with saints and angels than with specimens of the order to which Babs belonged.

"You're holding that lamp and looking at me as if you had never seen me before," she said. "You'll not forget me *again*, I expect."

"*Have* I seen you before?" said Cadenhouse, puzzled.

"Why, yes. I've sat on your knee and pulled your hair. You weren't so formal then. Don't you remember at Dane Court—Babs?" she said, impatiently.

"Oh, Babs!" he ejaculated, as if that explained everything. "But how you've grown!"

"Now don't say that, like everybody else," said Babs, pouting, "as if it were an unusual thing at my age. Put down the lamp and be more original. Here am I giving you a treat, and you don't seem to be enjoying it a bit."

"You say you came to see the light. Were you not afraid that you might encounter me?"

"Afraid! What is there to be afraid of? I just included the possibility of your catching me as another item to add to the excitement. I hoped to see you without being seen. I did want to know so much what you do up here; but that pesky dark down-stairs upset my plans. You heard me stumbling about, I suppose?" She smiled up in his face. "I was wondering how you'd take it if you caught me," she said. "You look almighty solemn. Are you very much put out?"

"I am very much embarrassed," he assured her. "I am not accustomed to visits from young ladies at this time of night, and I do not know how to entertain them."

"Oh, *I'm* not a young lady," said Babs. "Get rid of that idea, and you'll find yourself more at ease. I'm not even in long dresses, so don't be stiff and proud. It's absurd, you know, with a little girl who was pulling your hair not so very long ago."

"But you would not pull my hair now."



“‘YOU LOOK ALMIGHTY SOLEMN’”

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"No, nor sit on your knee; but only because that kind of thing wouldn't be a pleasure to me now."

"Do you do everything that is a pleasure, or that promises to be a pleasure to you?"

"Everything," said Babs. "But the things that were a pleasure last year are not a pleasure this."

"Ah!" said Cadenhouse, "you have learned that lesson, have you? You perceive already the transient nature of all earthly joys?"

"No, that did not strike me, because it does not matter," said Babs. "What I do perceive is the endless variety of earthly joys. I can see one of our earthly joys succeeding another on into eternity, and I want to try them all."

Cadenhouse put down the lamp and stood beside the table, gazing at her in perplexity.

Babs ensconced herself in a narrow, high-backed, oak arm-chair, and opened her cloak. It was a big black cloak that entirely covered her. Underneath she wore her ordinary evening-gown of soft white silk, made high at the neck, as became her age. Her bright fair hair shone against the dark wood, and her face settled into its habitual expression of angelic sweetness. She was looking at a picture on the wall opposite that interested her, and Cadenhouse, seeing her so, marvelled that such an audacious spirit could assume such an aspect of reverent repose. He had run quickly over in his own mind the various possibilities that this outrageous escapade of hers portended, and had come to the conclusion that it was his duty to read her such a lecture as should effectually put a stop to this form of adventure.

"Babs," he began.

"Cadenhouse," she rejoined, turning to him and smiling bewitchingly.

Cadenhouse condoned the impertinence by responding

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to the smile involuntarily. What he had intended to say escaped him. He substituted something else.

"When your curiosity is quite satisfied," he said, "I will see you safe home."

"Then begin at once and show me everything," said Babs.

"I can show you nothing you have not already seen," he answered, firmly.

"Oh, Cadenhouse," she pleaded, "you'll show me the light? You'll show me the upper stage? You'll tell me all you do?" She jumped up and clasped his arm in her eagerness. Cadenhouse looked down into the sweet little face but stood firm. She threw her arms round his neck, and drew his face down to hers and rubbed her cheek against his cheek, coaxing like a little child. "You must! You must!" she said.

Cadenhouse gently disengaged himself.

"I am sorry," he answered her, stiffly—"I am sorry I cannot. Perhaps in the future—" He took a turn about the room. "But come, come," he said, at last. "I will see you safe home."

Babs pouted.

"Thank you," she said. "Is that to be the extent of your hospitality?"

"What else can I do for you?"

"You can show me the tower, and tell me all you do," she persisted. "Won't you? Oh, do!"

Cadenhouse shook his head.

"I never allow any one to go farther than this stage," he said.

"Oh, but do let *me*!" Babs pleaded. "This is all so commonplace—what anybody might have imagined. I want to go all the way up. I tell you I *ache* to go. I shall give you no peace till you let me."

"You would be dreadfully disappointed," he said.

"Well, let me be disappointed," she rejoined.

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But Cadenhouse stood firm in spite of her pleading.

"Perhaps—some day," he said, at last. "Certainly not to-night."

"I shall come when you are not here," Babs threatened.

But he smiled at the threat, and then bethought him.

"By-the-way, how did you get in to-night?" he asked.

Babs looked hard at him, but she would not say, and he was obliged to let the question drop.

Then there was a pause.

"You said you had several reasons for coming," he said, at last; "but you have only given me one."

"My curiosity?" she answered. "Well, another reason was—but never you mind. If you keep your thing-umbobs to yourself I shall keep mine. I suppose you didn't hear my music to-night?"

"I fancied I heard the notes of a nightingale, but I was dreaming."

Babs took a deep breath, then suddenly warbled a stave. Cadenhouse listened and forgot to be stern any more.

"You have a beautiful voice," he said. "But why did you advertise your visit in that way, if you were afraid of being caught?"

"To find out if you were here, of course. I thought if you heard me you would make some sign."

"But, my dear child, if I had heard you, that would have been catching you all the same."

"I should have had time to get away," said Babs.

"Oh, you reckoned on that, did you?" he said.

"Not on that altogether, either," said Babs.

"On what, then?"

"On the assurance in myself that no harm could come to me."

"What assurance?" he asked.

"It came to me in this way," she rejoined. "I was

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sitting on the side of my bed, feeling bored, and wondering what I should do. I consulted the portrait of an ancestor of mine that hangs in my room ; and the answer that came to me was :

“ ‘There is a power whose care
Traces thy way along the pathless coast,
The desert, and illimitable air,
Lone wand’ring, but not lost.’

I couldn’t think what it meant at first. Then I saw your light, and knew you were back ; and I was seized with the impulse to come and explore. ‘ But if he should catch me ?’ I said to my ancestor, and again the answer came to me in myself :

“ ‘There is a power whose care
Traces thy way along the pathless coast,
The desert, and illimitable air,
Lone wand’ring, but not lost.’

Then I understood it. I knew it would be all right whether you caught me or not. And you see it is.”

Cadenhouse was considering her very gravely.

“ Do you often seek that sort of guidance ?” he asked.

“ Always,” she said. “ It doesn’t always come to me, but when it does, it’s sure to be right. And I act on it.”

She looked at him, and, seeing him so solemn, laughed and sang irrelevantly :

“ ‘Oh, I’m a young lady you can’t control,
I haven’t a soul ! I haven’t a soul.’

You say I have a beautiful voice,” she broke off. “ I assure you I have a beautiful appetite also. I’ve had nothing to eat for hours.”

“ I suppose your mother sent you supperless to bed to punish you for some outrageous act of insubordination ?” said Cadenhouse, dryly.

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"No, I went supperless to bed to punish my mother for an outrageous act of insubordination. But I can't go into that now—I'm famishing. Do get me something to eat!"

"But I haven't a scrap of anything here."

"How disappointing!" said Babs. "Can't you get something?"

Cadenhouse reflected.

"I don't want to encourage you," he said, hesitating.

"That is to say, you want to discourage me," said Babs. "That isn't possible, so don't waste strength in the effort. Cadenhouse, do get me something to eat!"

She was leaning back in the old oak chair again. He looked at her. She was pale; she had evidently fasted too long.

"If I get you something to eat," he said, "will you promise me to curb your curiosity for the future, and never let it lead you into an escapade of this kind again?"

"I promise you *solemnly*," said Babs, and shut her eyes.

Cadenhouse hurried out of the apartment, but locked the door after him.

"Well, that is mean," said Babs.

She opened her eyes and looked about her, but she did not move. She knew he would not have trusted her there alone had there been anything interesting to be rummaged out.

Cadenhouse was absent a considerable time. He returned with a basketful of things.

"I'm afraid I haven't much to offer you," he said.

"Oh!" said Babs, keenly disappointed. "I thought you'd have such good things here. I often used to think when I saw your light—I can see it from my bedroom window—I used to wonder what you were eating, and want some."

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"Then you used always to think of me as eating here alone?"

"Yes," said Babs; "I could think of nothing more interesting. But I was younger then. It was before you went away."

Cadenhouse had drawn up a table in front of her, and was covering it with the contents of the basket.

"What do you give me the credit of doing now?" he asked.

"I've not had time to give you any credit yet," Babs answered. "You've only just returned. But I should certainly have expected you to be having some sort of a good time." She surveyed the table. "You needn't have apologized for the viands," she assured him. "Your flesh-pots are ample. I'll begin with the prawns. Glory! what a delight it is to eat good things!"

"Babs, I am afraid your soul is not above—"

"Victuals?" she broke in. "I should think not! You can be cutting me some chicken and tongue."

He obeyed mechanically.

"I'll tell you what they say about me," she rattled on. "They say I never know what I want, and I've got no soul—and all that sort of thing, don't you know?"

"Indeed," Cadenhouse answered, absently helping himself.

"I'm glad you're going to eat something," she interjected. "It's more sociable. I shall be able to eat twice as much now you've begun. Try the prawns. But I was telling you—it's astonishing what a lot I have to tell you—I believe I could go on talking to you all night. I like to look at you, too. You *are* nice to look at! Do you think you would like me if I had a soul? I suppose I have no soul," she added, somewhat wistfully, "since everybody says so, and what everybody says must be true. But if it were a grudging deity made me, and didn't dole me out a soul, it isn't my fault."

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"I'm not blaming you," said Cadenhouse.

"Well, that *is* unexpected!" she ejaculated. "But perhaps I shouldn't mind not having a soul, in view of the digestion I've got. I'm grateful for that. You can't have everything, and I've heard that in this world we should all do better if we prayed for sound digestions and let our souls alone. What have you brought me to drink? Nothing? Well!"

"What will you have?" Cadenhouse asked, apologetically. "Milk?"

Babs looked scornful.

"No, thank you," she said, with a grimace. "Give me something fizzy."

He went to a cupboard and took out some lemons and soda-water.

"I'll make you some lemonade," he said.

"Good!" she answered, to his relief. He was dreading a demand for champagne.

"The next time I come—" she was beginning, but he interrupted her.

"You are not coming again," he said, decidedly. "Remember your promise."

"What promise?" she asked, raising her innocent eyebrows.

"You don't mean to say you have forgotten?"

"Oh yes, I've forgotten," she answered—"if it were anything you wrung from me in a cowardly way when I was suffering under the cruel pressure of hunger."

"I thought better of you, Babs," he said, reproachfully.

"I've quite done now," she responded, cheerfully, getting up and shaking the crumbs from her knees; "and I've had a real good time. You're going to see me home, aren't you?"

Cadenhouse was not quick of speech. His mind did not skip readily from one subject to another, and as he found no form in which to express what he had in it at

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that moment, he held his peace. He proceeded to wrap Babs up in her cloak, and as he buttoned it under her upturned chin he was again struck by the peculiar charm of her face, its angelic expression. Was it possible that appearance and character could be so much at variance as hers apparently were ?

" I am afraid you will regret this good time when the day of reckoning comes to-morrow," he said, grimly.

" What do you mean ?" she demanded.

" I mean that I must tell your mother of this visit."

" You won't do that ?" she exclaimed.

" I must," he answered, firmly.

" Well, that would be mean—telling tales !" she cried. " And it wouldn't be a bit of use, either—I should swear you were lying. I would, Cadenhouse—I would, indeed."

" Don't talk in that reckless way," said Cadenhouse, seriously. " You know you would not lie."

" Yes, I would," said Babs, positively. " But that would not save mamma. Once you put that idea into her head she'll never have another hour's quiet sleep at night if I'm out of her sight. And she can't be watching me always."

This consideration weighed with Cadenhouse.

" But look here, Babs," he said, very gravely. " You have your own good name to consider. If you do things like this, what will people think of you ?"

" What ! You think my good name will suffer because I came to see this place of yours—and you the most respectable gentleman in the neighborhood ?"

" But consider the time of night, my dear child."

" Oh, Cadenhouse, for shame !" said Babs. " You don't mean to insinuate that a gentleman is less of a gentleman at midnight than at mid-day ?"

" That is what is popularly supposed," said Cadenhouse, grimly.

" Well, I can't help that," said Babs, drawing her

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cloak round her and throwing the end of it over her shoulder. "It isn't true in your case, and I mean to regulate my life by what is true."

"I hope that is true, at all events," Cadenhouse commented.

"Oh yes, that's true," she rejoined. "But come to-morrow, and let me tell you—and you tell me."

"What?"

"Oh, don't you know? Well, never mind. Just drop in casually for luncheon at half-past one. Mamma will be delighted to see you. And I shall be able to ask you heaps of things. You ought to come and inquire, in any case; it's only polite. Why, I may be ill to-morrow after all this fatigue."

Cadenhouse looked at her thoughtfully and sighed. Babs was a fascinating imp, but quite impossible.

He took up a lamp and led the way down the stone steps. Below, on the ground floor, they found themselves in what looked like the crypt of a church. There were no windows, only slits in the solid masonry that let in the cool air from outside. The groined roof was supported by short, massive pillars, which evidently bore a great part of the weight of the whole edifice. There were two heavy oak doors, iron clamped, one large, one small. The larger door was the main entrance to the tower; the smaller one, which was low and narrow, opened into the underground passage which Cadenhouse used in order to go backward and forward to the house. Both doors were securely fastened on the inside. The larger one had evidently not been opened for a considerable time, to judge by the cobwebs which festooned it; the key of the smaller one had not been out of Cadenhouse's possession since his return.

"Babs," he said, sternly, "how did you get in?"

"Cadenhouse," she answered, in imitation of his sternness, raising her hand and pointing upward dramati-

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cally as she spoke—"Cadenhouse, what are you always doing up there alone?"

Cadenhouse closed his mouth obstinately.

It was a deadlock. There was nothing for it but to tell, or to go unanswered.

Cadenhouse went unanswered.

CHAPTER VII

THE next day, in the afternoon, Montacute and Babs stood on the steps, seeing their mother off for her afternoon drive. Julia accompanied her that day. Babs had a switch in her hand. Her eyes were unusually wide open, her cheeks were somewhat pale. Her attention continually wandered to something away in the distance. She had been in a restless state of expectation all the morning, but now she was reckless. Cadenhouse had not put in an appearance.

The weather had cleared, but the ground was still soaking from the heavy rains of the previous day.

"What are you children going to do?" Mrs. Kingconstance asked, as she settled herself comfortably in the carriage.

Montacute looked at Babs; Babs looked up at the sky.

"It would be a nice day for a walk," she said.

"Well, keep to the high-road, where the foot-paths are dry, like good children," Mrs. Kingconstance said. "Babs, you will only go where it's dry?" she added, anxiously. "Promise me."

But Babs ran lightly down the steps when her mother began to make terms, and the next instant the horses plunged so violently that Mrs. Kingconstance was jerked back on her cushions.

"Oh, don't wait if they're going to be restive," she called to the coachman, nervously.

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The carriage dashed down the drive. The coachman and footman looked out of the corners of their eyes at each other knowingly and grinned.

Babs swung the stick round her head till it sang through the air.

"Good switch!" she said. "Another minute, and we should have been bound to take a prim walk. Parents are so unreasonable! Look at those horses—they're still capering."

"You might have upset the carriage," said Montacute.

"Yes," said Babs, unconcernedly; "and how funny they'd all have looked—especially mamma, sprawling among the cushions on the ground. Let's go to Wyldeholme, Cute, by the fields."

"All right," he answered, but dubiously. He had a book under his arm, and would rather have been left alone to read it.

"Come, then, quick," said Babs, "before somebody else pounces upon us and tries to stop us. We'll have tea with old Grimwood. What do you want with that horrid book?" She snatched it from him and threw it down on a seat in the portico. "I can't understand people who bother with books when there is all that"—she waved her hands to the wide world—"and the sun is shining." She caught his hand and dragged him down the steps.

"Perhaps if you'd any use for books you'd like them," he retorted, yielding to her imperious will, but reluctantly.

"Thank Heaven, I haven't!" Babs answered, cheerfully. "There are plenty of book-fools in the family without me. The one among us who'd be distinguished would be the one with some common-sense, and that's what I mean to cultivate. You can do the poet, and mamma can do the dignified matron, and Julia the social aspirant, and Aunt Lorraine—poor Aunt Lorraine," she

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broke off, compassionately. "Cute, they say there's something wanting about Aunt Lorraine. What do you think it is? She's clever, you know; she can do such a lot of things—draw, paint, play, sing—anything she likes. What can be wrong?"

"Wants balance," said Cute, sententiously.

"Ah, that's too hard for me," said Babs, upon reflection. "I should have to think about ever so many more things in order to explain it to myself—what is 'balance,' you know, and that sort of thing. Too much trouble; I don't want to think—I want to feel. Oh-h-h!"—she drew in a long breath of pleasure—"but the air is sweet!"

"They say you're wanting, too, Babs," said Cute. "They say you're a soulless little animal."

"I know," said Babs, with a gratified smile. "But what do I want with a soul? I seem to be able to get on without one. I'm never ill; I can't say I'm never unhappy; but I *do* have good times! If you knew!"

She hugged herself on the recollection of her last night's exploits. She did not take her brother into her confidence, however. She followed her favorite pursuits alone, and lost interest in them if she ever discussed them. In all that concerned her intimate sensations she was secretive.

"Oh yes, I get on all right without a soul," she pursued; "but Aunt Lorraine doesn't seem to be able to get on without balance—whatever that may be. Don't let us think, though. Let us have a good time."

They had scampered across the lawn in front of the house and down the long avenue to the left, which ended in an iron gate. The gate was locked, but Lorraine, forgetful, as usual, of her petticoats, bundled herself over it, and set off again, helter-skelter, across the park, followed by Cute as hard as he could tear. Soppy tufts of

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grass much impeded their progress. Babs tripped, but took it as a matter of course that she should come down occasionally.

"There goes another gown!" she remarked.

"You'd not be so casual if you had to buy them," he grumped.

"Why not?" she demanded. "It's good for trade."

"What do you know about trade?"

"Nothing, except that it's nasty to be in it and nice to encourage it. That's another thing that I should want to have explained to me if I were stupid enough to be clever."

They were out of sight of the house by this time. Babs slackened her speed, and began to look about her. It was a lovely day. Spring had set in. There was warmth in the sunshine. The sap was stirring in the trees, and burgeoning buds proclaimed it. A lowing of herds and bleating of sheep was in the air, and the birds were preparing their songs for the summer. Overhead, the sky was magnificent. Great bright masses of snowy cloud sailed majestically over infinite depths of blue.

Babs looked up in awe and admiration; but her fickle interest was not to be held in long by the heavens, when on earth there were deer in the distance and pheasants peeping from the coverts near at hand.

The park sloped at this point with a gradual descent down to a rivulet which divided the Dane Court property from Wyldeholme. In summer it was always a merry stream, brisk and babbling, but now it had acquired the dignity of depth from the recent rains, and moved with a solemn murmur, neither laughing nor complaining. On the other side the ground ascended somewhat steeply. The stream had to be crossed on stepping-stones, and these were covered now with an inch or two of water. But water was no impediment to Babs. In she

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splashed, followed by her brother, and both landed, dripping, on the other side.

They climbed the hill, and paused a moment when they reached the top to look about them. The country all round was rich in wood and water, in upland, meadow, and arable lands.

"Babs," said Montacute, "how jolly it would be if Wyldeholme were yours! Just fancy what fun we could have when I come into Dane Court! We might make a tunnel through—a secret tunnel from one house to the other—and learn black magic and frighten the folk."

He looked back the way they had come. All the lovely lands that lay behind them were his, but his pale face took on an extra tinge of melancholy as he surveyed the prospect.

"The place won't be much to me if you aren't there," he said, "or at all events near at hand."

"I shouldn't have thought you'd care to have me anywhere in the neighborhood, judging from the way you've been snapping at me ever since we set out," Babs remarked, in a casual way. "You're irritable to-day, Cute; that's what's the matter with you."

"Yes, I *am* irritable," he confessed, in a like easy tone. "I have little enough body, but I've no nerves. I'm the mistake of the family. You and Julia are splendid."

"You're no mistake," said Babs, consolatrix. "Think of the head you have! Why, Mr. Bruce says it's nonsense to talk of teaching you! The difficulty is to keep up with you, you learn at such a rate. And what you want is head, with such estates to manage. It doesn't matter for us; we'll have our husbands to do all the drudgery for us. Not but what Julia is clever. She has a mind of her own, but it isn't like yours. Your mind is like your land, capable of producing all kinds of crops; Julia's is just a nice little patch of garden ground,

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which she will cultivate to the uttermost, and get all she can out of it. You'll see. She'll fill it with flowers—all the pretty-pretties. It will be a regular show-place, Julia's mind, when she's a woman. All she has in it will be always on view. I wonder what we shall all be doing when you come of age ! I suppose mamma will go to dear London, and take Julia with her ; but I wish she wouldn't. I hate all change ; and I wish we could live here always, all four together, just like this."

"Including Julia?"

"Why not ? I suppose we must all separate sooner or later, but I shall hate it when the time comes. I know I squabble with Julia, but I like to have her about all the same, even if it's only to squabble with. She's my only sister, you see."

"The less excuse for her," said Cute. "I don't look forward to having her at Dane Court all her life at all. I hope she'll marry and be happy elsewhere."

"I shall hate it when she does," Babs reiterated.

"As long as you're together she'll always be playing you nasty tricks, as she did yesterday about those violets—taking the credit you deserve ; and you'll always be shrugging your shoulders and saying it doesn't matter, I suppose."

"Very likely," said Babs, indifferently. "Let's get on."

She led the way once more, stumbling along impetuously, down a narrow, rough, winding path, through thick plantations which blocked their view, until they came in sight of the beautiful old manor of Wyldeholme, nestling in a hollow just below. The house was sheltered by great trees, and surrounded by large gardens, terraced to the south, but laid out on the other side in long borders, where old-fashioned flowers flourished, and in mossy lawns, broken by close-clipped hedges of holly and box and yew, and shrubberies, ever green—a lovely

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spot, but of melancholy beauty. It was in vain that the brightest flowers bloomed there in their seasons. The place did not take its tone from the flowers, but from the junipers with bleeding berries, the dark Scotch firs, larch, deodora, Wellingtonia, and yew. It was one of those places upon which the past is forever brooding. The past got hold of you when you wandered there alone, and lay in wait for you at every turn, so that you were always asking of it, "What happened here?" And it would have surprised you more to meet a modern girl in a sailor hat in a sheltered alley than a lady from out of the long ago, strutting on high heels, in stiff brocade, and powder and patches.

The path through the plantation brought the children to a little gate which gave on a green lawn at one end of the house. Here, at either corner, there were deep bay-windows, opening on to stone steps which descended to the garden. Between the two bay-windows was a broad veranda with a marble bulustrade. The rooms off the veranda were shut up now, as also was the bay-window on the right; but that on the left was wide open, and the blinds were drawn up.

"Hurrah!" said Babs. "We're in luck. Grim's airing the boudoir. Aren't we in a pickle, Mrs Grim?" she demanded, running up the steps and appearing suddenly before the startled housekeeper.

"Gracious goodness, miss!" the old lady exclaimed, turning from the cabinet she was dusting—"both of you! Pickle, indeed! I never saw a young lady and gentleman in such a mess in all my born days. However you've managed it, I can't think. Miss Lorraine, you're a big girl now. You did ought to know better—you really did."

"Look here, Mrs. Grim," said Babs, "if you begin to scold, I shall do some damage to the place. It's quite enough to have them going gray at Dane Court over my

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dirty dress. I've come here for a change—for tea and jocularly. Please be kind. You've no idea how much nicer you look when you're pleasant."

Mrs. Grimwood made an ineffectual effort to be severe. Plump and pleasant and kindly were the characteristics of her appearance, and there was an air of affluence about her even when, as on this occasion, she was only wearing her second-best black silk—an atmosphere of comfort, into which all were absorbed who approached her.

"Why do you always do this room yourself?" Cute asked.

"It's Mr. Jeffrey's wish, sir."

"Because of his mother?"

The housekeeper nodded.

"My mother says," Cute pursued, "that Lady Blanche Wylde was one of the loveliest and most unhappy women she ever knew—her husband was such a brute; and mamma always speaks of 'that poor boy Jeffrey' as if he'd been awfully bullied at home."

"I don't suppose he deserves to be pitied," said Babs. "He's sure to take after his father,"

"I don't see that," Cute argued. "Boys generally take after their mothers."

"Do they, Grim?" Babs demanded.

"Some does, and some does not," was the cautious rejoinder. "I knew a young gentleman—"

"Oh, I say," Cute broke in, impatiently, "haven't you nearly done with this tiresome dusting? I'm famishing for something to eat."

"Then you must have something at once, I suppose," Mrs. Grimwood answered resignedly, shaking the duster out of the window, and leading the way to her own room.

There Cute threw himself into a big arm-chair, and lay back with his legs dangling, looking singularly quaint and old.

"When do you expect long-legged Jeffrey?" he asked.

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"How do you know his legs are long?" Babs broke in.

"Shure, thin, don't I remimber him, honey?" Cute rejoined.

"He doesn't speak a bit like that," Babs snapped; "and I don't remember him."

"Naturally not, you goose; you were in your cradle."

"Hush, children," said Mrs. Grimwood. "You mustn't gird at each other like that."

"Bless you! we're not girding," said Babs. "It's only our playful way. We raise our voices to reach each other's understanding. But I say, Grim, do tell me, has Jeffrey got long legs?"

"As fine as any in the county when he left," said Mrs. Grimwood from amid her preparations for tea; "but not exactly long—nor short, neither. Just right, you know. He was twenty-one when he went, and that's seven years since. Dear, dear, how time does go! He's travelled most everywhere by now; but he'll soon be back, I trust, please God."

"I hope he'll never come," said Babs. "It'll make a change when he comes, and I hate changes. Besides, I'm sure he's a beast like his father, and he'll shut up the grounds and make himself disagreeable in every possible way."

"Don't you say such a thing, Miss Babs," Mrs. Grimwood remonstrated. "You don't know nothing of the kind, and you've no call to say it if you did."

Babs laughed.

"I've a great mind to take off my shoes and stockings and dry them," Cute said, suddenly, after a pause.

Mrs. Grimwood pricked up her ears.

"Are they wet?" she asked.

He stretched out a leg for her to feel.

"Miss Lorraine," she said, solemnly, "you should know better."

"Oh, of course!" Babs retorted. "Make me my broth-

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er's keeper ! Everybody expects me to pick his steps for him—because I'm younger, and stupider, and more thoughtless, I suppose."

She had grown very red, and round the rims of her angelic blue eyes something shone suspiciously.

"It's all right, Babs," Montacute assured her. "Don't you fret. It's better to have a lot expected of you for being big than to be set down for a silly who can't take care of himself, like me, because I'm small."

"Here, take your teas, children," Mrs. Grimwood put in. "There is no harm done, so stop disputing. I'll send you back in the dog-cart when Mr. Montacute's shoes and socks are dry. Sit here, sir, with your feet to the fire while you wait, and I'll put your tea beside you."

Then Babs fell to, and having imperilled the precarious health of her beloved brother by dragging him after her through mud and water, she proceeded, for the relief of her own feelings, and in proof of her concern, to endanger his safety still further by forcing upon him quantities of the most unwholesome things on the table.

CHAPTER VIII

JULIA and her mother had been to see Miss Spice that afternoon, and had found her all in a twitter of pleasurable excitement. It had been a day of days to Miss Spice, such a one as had never come to her before. In the morning Mr. Jellybond Tinney had paid his promised visit. Miss Spice had been awake the greater part of the night, living over and over again the delightful circumstances of their meeting in the afternoon—recalling her first glimpse of him in the distance, her first impression of his importance, what he had said and she had said, and how each had acted from beginning to end. She had related the whole episode in minute detail to the good aunt with whom she lived, Mrs. Sophia Pepper, when they were at tea ; but Mrs. Sophia Pepper had not been sympathetic.

“Some bagman, I suppose,” she grumped ; “but, at any rate, he’ll never come near *you*, my dear”—a sinister prognostication which found only too ready an echo in poor, dear, humble little Miss Spice’s diffident soul.

All the same she was up at daylight and had turned out the drawing-room, cleaned it thoroughly, rearranged the furniture to the best advantage, decked it with fragrant violets, fresh culled for the purpose, and carefully lowered the blinds just far enough to make a pleasant shade in the room without shutting out the pretty glimpse of the garden, with its old trees, and the long, level road running south. Miss Spice had always ex-

pected the knight who was to be hers to come to her by that road out of the dim, mysterious distance. She had pictured a tired horseman dropping with fatigue at her gate, to whom she would offer hospitality and kind care, with the inevitable result. But Mr. Jellybond Tinney must come by the road on the right from the village—if, indeed, he came at all.

Miss Spice took a last look round the drawing-room. It was a quaint apartment, narrow for its length, with nothing in it that was not old and elegant ; but Miss Spice's heart contracted as she contemplated it. She did not appreciate the lovely Chippendale and Sheraton with which it was furnished. She thought those things so many items added to the heavy handicap with which she had started in life, and yearned for " occasional chairs " and chiffonniers, and all the other monstrosities in the cheap tastelessness of the period.

They kept no servant, and she felt that this fact should be concealed at the present juncture until it could be accounted for romantically, so as to divest it of its sordidness and lend it a pathetic interest. But who was to open the door ? A fleeting vision of Aunt Sophia playing the part of housekeeper—which she might have done to perfection, her appearance being quite in keeping with the character—crossed Miss Spice's mind, but was instantly dismissed for a generous reason. Little Miss Spice would never have cast her dear old aunt for an invidious part. Therefore, there was only one thing to be done—set the hall door open, go up-stairs, and wait till he arrived, and then come running down just in time to go forward unaffectedly and invite him in.

Miss Spice retired to her own bedroom, from the window of which she could see some little distance down the road to the right. She was prepared to wait a weary while, but she had scarcely taken her stand before she saw the sun glint on the glossy surface of a silk hat.

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Without waiting to see more, she rushed down-stairs into the kitchen.

"He's coming, aunt, he's coming!" she cried, breathlessly. "Come, quick, up to my room, and you'll see him!"

She ran back, and Mrs. Sophia Pepper put down the cup she was drying and followed her, wiping her hands on the tea-cloth as she went. She was nearly as much excited as Miss Spice.

Mr. Jellybond approached with a leisurely tread. He seemed to be enjoying the sunshine and the landscape. There was approval enough in his every glance to have encouraged the earth. He saw the two eager faces at the little lattice window, but no one would have suspected it.

"What do you think of him, aunt?" Miss Spice demanded, in a whisper.

"He's a fine man," the old lady owned, ungrudgingly, thawed, even at her age, out of her habitual cantankerousness by the unwonted and stimulating sight.

Miss Spice swept down the stairs into the hall, as she expressed it to herself, and met him at the door. The little manœuvre answered admirably.

When they were seated in the drawing-room, Mr. Jellybond Tinney looked about him with approval.

"Violets," he remarked. "How fragrant! I always think there is no scent so perfect for a lady's room. Roses are sweet, but their perfume is more blatant than that of the violet, if you know what I mean. May I make a remark?"

"Certainly—with pleasure," Miss Spice stammered, anxious above everything to be agreeable, and tripping over her words in the effort.

"Your furniture," he proceeded—"Chippendale—Sheraton. Preserved, I dare say, in your family a long time. Probably it was bought from the makers."

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"It was—so I've been told," said Miss Spice, apologetically. "My father and mother were old-fashioned; they never would replace it, and I have never been able to."

"I congratulate you," said Mr. Jellybond, impressively. "Your furniture is perfect; and it suits you, too, if I may venture to say so—it suits your type. These spindle-legs—how graceful!"

"Ye—yes," Miss Spice said, dubiously; but the big man blinked blandly, innocent of any double intention.

"If you should ever want money," he continued—"which Heaven forbid!—but if you should, remember your graceful spindle-legs. Collectors would give you a great deal for them. And I could myself play the part of a friend, and put you in the way of disposing of them to the best advantage."

"You are too kind, I'm sure," said Miss Spice, looking round at the room in a bewildered way.

"Yes," said Mr. Jellybond Tinney. "Let us be friends. You will be my friend now for a moment, and play a friend's part in the matter of the introduction you promised me."

"Oh, certainly," Miss Spice jerked out.

"And I will be your friend forever."

Miss Spice was speechless, but she bowed her thanks. Then there was a pause. She did not know what to do next.

"I really feel I am troubling you," Mr. Jellybond said.

"Not at all," she replied, but she did not move.

"Perhaps if I dictate the note," he suggested, in desperation, "I should then be taking my share of the trouble."

"If you would be so kind," said Miss Spice, greatly relieved. She had been dreading another request for the visiting-card she did not possess.

She sat down at the writing-bureau, and, although her

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hand trembled as if she were signing the marriage register, she managed to write clearly, as follows, to Mr. Jellybond's dictation :

" DEAR MR. WORRINGHAM,—May I have the pleasure of introducing to you a friend of mine, Mr. Jellybond Tinney ? He has been a traveller in his time, and has done and seen a great deal, but is now anxious to rest on his laurels, and he would like very much to take a house in this neighborhood and end his days among us in peace. I am sure you will find him a good, sound Churchman, an excellent parishioner, and one ever ready to help you in all good works. I may mention that his means are ample.

" I have been thinking the Swiss Cottage might suit him, but I have advised him to consult you about it, and, if you recommend the place, I will ask you to be so good as to give him an introduction to Squire Normanton in order to facilitate the settlement of the business.

" With kind regards and many apologies for troubling you,

" Sincerely yours,

" ALICIA SPICE."

"Ah," said Mr. Jellybond, glancing at the note before he put it in his pocket, " thank you. This will bring me good-luck "—and he tapped his coat. " My good genius has always been a woman. First my mother—but I must not look back ; I must look forward now. Henceforth my object in life will be to do what little good I can, and my motto is ' Enjoy.' I mean to enjoy as I go along, and help others to enjoy. I may say, already, that I enjoy everything I do—and not the least shall I enjoy coming here, when I am invited, to visit an unsophisticated young lady. Unsophisticated, my dear Miss Spice," he announced, as he rose to take his leave—" un-

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sophisticated means, in my dictionary, sweet and un-hackneyed."

"Oh yes, of course. To be sure—quite so," said Miss Spice.

Mr. Worringham received Mr. Jellybond Tinney with the kindest consideration, and fell at once under the dominion of his strong personality. The large man filled the vicarage with a new atmosphere—a well-fed, vitalizing atmosphere, charged with energy, and suggestive of temporal pleasures. His fat, mellow voice boomed about the place, his whole presence was stimulating, and his cheery attitude towards the world and his wife had the effect upon Mr. Worringham of a sudden increase of appetite. Mr. Jellybond made the good vicar feel as if he should like to eat, too, and live. Mr. Worringham in his study was surrounded by ecclesiastical symbols, and was himself in appearance a typical ecclesiastic of the refined ascetic type. He was not a man of any capacity, or he would not have been left by his distinguished family to vegetate at Danehurst, but he had that charm which is independent of mental capacity, the charm of simplicity and perfect sincerity. These were at once his strength and his weakness—his strength in that they won him the affection and respect of his people, his weakness in so far as they rendered him liable to be imposed upon. Charitable, unsuspecting, incapable of evil, either in thought, word, or deed, he might have done well in heaven, but was quite unfit for the work of this world. He had not got much beyond mediæval times when Mr. Jellybond Tinney arrived that morning, and he had been feeling mediæval too, if we may judge of mediæval feelings by the expression of mediæval faces in the pictures; but before Mr. Jellybond Tinney had been with him half an hour, he had advanced several centuries at a bound.

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"So you are an old friend of Miss Spice's?" he said, when he had read the note.

"Oh, fie!" Mr. Jellybond answered. "One never calls a lady old."

Mr. Worringham nodded his head at that, and smiled knowingly.

"Squire Normanton—the Swiss Cottage," he said, making an effort to reflect. "Why, yes, to be sure—delighted. Between ourselves"—he lowered his voice confidentially—"he'll be very glad to get rid of it. If you'll come—I'm just going out—I'll show you the place, and then, if you like, we'll go on and see the squire. Between ourselves"—he again became confidential—"it's very much out of repair, you know, and he hasn't the means—that's the difficulty with the landed gentry—no ready money."

As they walked up the village street they saw two tall, dark ladies, evidently mother and daughter, approaching. Both ladies stared at Mr. Jellybond in a startled way, as though there were something unexpected in his appearance. The mother called a halt by stopping dead in front of the two gentlemen.

"How do you do, Mr. Worringham?" she said, in a deep, stern voice.

"Oh! Mrs. Japp! How do you do? Miss Florence, too!" the vicar exclaimed.

"I am well," said Mrs. Japp, with her eye on Mr. Jellybond.

That gentleman, with his habitual presence of mind, clicked his heels together, foreign fashion, raised his hat high, and bowed.

"Oh yes," said Mr. Worringham, collecting himself—"yes, to be sure—yes—quite well, thank you—yes. Oh yes—let me present—Mr. Jellybond Tinney—er—er—Mr. Jellybond Tinney."

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"May I venture to describe myself as a new parishioner?" Mr. Jellybond asked.

"Yes, to be sure, I hope so," said Mr. Worringham. "Quite an acquisition, eh, Mrs. Japp? One more gentleman."

"And no lady?" Mrs. Japp sternly demanded.

"No, alas!" said Mr. Jellybond. "No kind lady has taken pity upon me—as yet."

He looked at the two ladies so as to include them both impartially in this touching confidence.

"But—mustn't detain you," said Mr. Worringham. "Very busy."

The mother and daughter went their way with a curiously altered demeanor. As they approached it might have been observed that they were both silent and depressed; but no sooner were the gentlemen out of hearing than they turned to each other and began to step out and talk with extraordinary animation.

After an elaborate inspection of the house and grounds, Mr. Jellybond was satisfied that he could make the Swiss Cottage all that he desired in a residence, and he accordingly accepted Mr. Worringham's offer to drive with him at once to Normanton Hall to see the squire.

CHAPTER IX

MRS. KINGCONSTANCE'S visit to Miss Spice that afternoon was a visit of kindness and condescension, tempered by a natural desire to know what everybody was doing in the neighborhood ; for poor dear Miss Spice was not, you know, quite—well, her father was a clergyman, and that, of course, entitled her to be called upon, but then Mrs. Sophia Pepper, the widowed aunt on her mother's side with whom she lived, was not a person with any claim to be recognized, and that made it a little awkward. However, the aunt could be civilly ignored for the sake of Miss Spice—and the news of the neighborhood. The Cross Roads Cottage was most conveniently situated where four roads, running east, west, north, and south, crossed just outside the village of Danehurst ; and it had somehow become the custom of " the county " to call there often, in spite of the detrimental aunt. Ladies were wont to make it the object of their afternoon drive, and thus it became a centre to which all the news of the neighborhood flowed. The cottage faced south, and from that direction only was it visible to people approaching it. On the other three sides it was hidden from the road by the screen of trees which encircled the delightful old garden. In the summer the garden itself was a great attraction. Ladies would make rendezvous with each other there, and would sit out together under the trees, enjoying the heavenly seclusion and each other's conversation, while little Miss Spice and her aunt made tea

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for them, and felt well rewarded by the honor of entertaining them, although several teas of an afternoon were a severe tax on the slender resources of the two poor ladies. There was, however, joy in the luxury of giving and in the gentle, generous courtesy and kindness which made of their frugal hospitality such an acceptable sacrifice; so perhaps, after all, they were right to give without grudging, and with no thought of other gain than the pleasure of providing refreshment and receiving thanks for the same.

The institution of the Cross Roads tea-house must have been a real boon to ladies living seventeen miles from a railway station, for they had but a tabby time of it. Husbands were growing old, or had died, and brothers had gone out into the world, so that for the most part society was composed of lonely ladies—wives, widows, and spinsters. The few men who might be counted on for a dinner-party were landed gentry, in honor of whom any small function such as an afternoon tea was held in vain, so that the appearance of a gentleman who was not a clergyman at the more informal gatherings had become such a rare event that if one did come by any chance, enough was made of him to turn his head for life. In fact, the importance of a man—a ladies' man—in that secluded region had so increased since the railway passed it by on the other side of the county that any conceited ape, if only his manners had been presentable, would have been received at his own valuation by the most exclusive people in the district.

The lonely, stay-at-home ladies were not for the most part women of means. If there were any money in the family, the men kept it, and spent it on themselves. The men had the best education, the best chance of cultivating their minds by travel and experience, and the most amusement; the women were pretty generally skimped in everything that did not tend to increase the pleasure

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or vouch for the importance of their lords. As the young girls grew up, a sort of blight seemed to settle upon them ; their beauty faded, their possibilities shrank to nothing, and they became for the most part subdued and joyless. Occasionally a married woman would rise above her surroundings, develop all that was best in herself with infinite pains, form her daughters into fine characters, and be a hallowed influence to her sons ; but she was made to suffer for her originality the pin-pricks of the abject who ignobly endure—the usual penalty imposed upon those in advance of their time.

Mrs. Kingconstance was one of those people who used the pin on occasion. No wish of her own had ever been ungratified, and, therefore, she had no patience with those who complain of their lot in life. She had no imagination to bring home to her any evil or pain which that lot might include. She knew, of course, that Miss Spice's means were narrow ; but she considered them sufficient for Miss Spice's position, and never realized that Miss Spice was sadly nipped by the cold in winter for want of suitable clothing, and suffered more or less all the year round from insufficient food and various other privations. Mrs. Kingconstance, in comfort in her carriage, often passed Miss Spice on the road in muddy weather, battling with the wind, on her way to the village shop ; but it never occurred to her that Miss Spice was to be pitied, far less helped. The arrangement of the world suited Mrs. Kingconstance admirably, and if other people were not so well off as herself, it was presumably the will of the Lord, which nobody should question. Looking at life from the cushions of her carriage, she saw nothing that she would have had altered ; and had Miss Spice, from her point of view, been inclined to cavil, Mrs. Kingconstance would have become suspicious of her, and avoided her. She would have dropped any one's acquaintance had she found them differing from ac-

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cepted conditions to the extent of disapproving of them ; yet Mrs. Kingconstance would have been much surprised had anybody hinted that she was not a most large-minded, as well as kindly and considerate, person, or that she failed to fulfil her whole duty in every relation of life. She had many humble acquaintances to whom she condescended to be affable ; but she carefully kept them in their places ; and made them feel the difference of position. In her friends, rank and wealth were all but indispensable. She did acknowledge, however, that birth may sometimes come down in the world by no fault of its own, and she did not, therefore, scorn to visit birth in reduced circumstances. But, like others of her class, she was ready to make exceptions to any rule of her life when it suited herself, and if some of the people she countenanced had less claim to that distinction than she considered necessary, she had always an excuse ready which made the lapse redound to her own credit. When she indulged in a good gossip, a thing she dearly loved, with a person not at all her equal, she quite understood in herself that she was immensely superior to that kind of thing, really, only she did not think it nice to snub the good creature by refusing to listen.

Miss Spice happened to look out of the window just as Mrs. Kingconstance's carriage stopped at the garden gate that afternoon. The sunlight glinted on the polished panels and the silver-mounted harness ; the horses, chafing at their cruel bearing-reins, pawed the ground and tossed their heads in pain ; the footman leaped to the ground alertly and held out his arm to help his lady to descend ; and the heart of little Miss Spice, in view of such signs of wealth and position, expanded pleasantly, so that when Mrs. Kingconstance sailed into the little drawing-room, followed by her daughter Julia, it would be hard to say which had the highest idea of her importance, she herself or Miss Spice. She arrived most

opportunely, too, to add to Miss Spice's gratification, for Mrs. and Miss Japp were there already, and Mrs. Normanton, the squire's wife, with two of her daughters, and they would all be pleased to see Mrs. Kingconstance. Mrs. Normanton herself was somebody, of course; but Mrs. Kingconstance, being quite the most exclusive person in the neighborhood, was everywhere the most desired. So Miss Spice was all twitters—and not on her own account only, but on everybody else's. She looked wonderfully well that afternoon, with her flaxen curls framing her little, peeky, pink and white face, and every action animated by the desire to please.

Mrs. Normanton was a broad embodiment of the prose and commonplace of her class. She was her husband's creature, without a will of her own. What mind she had was quite undeveloped by education, and contained a curious conglomerate of principles and prejudices. She belonged to the generation of landed gentry who could live at home in ease and idleness while the laborers on the estate, with their wives and children, were herded together indecently in unsanitary cottages, sweated of every penny of wages and every hour of time that could be wrung from them, expected to toil and suffer till they sank exhausted, then carted off to the workhouse to die in disgrace for that they could do no more. And Mrs. Normanton, like Mrs. Kingconstance, would have resented as an insult any suggestion that this was not as it should be, according to the will of God.

While Mrs. Normanton and Mrs. Kingconstance were entertaining each other—which they began to do at once without further considering their hostess, their daughters following their example, while Mrs. and Miss Japp looked on—little Miss Spice twittered into the kitchen on the tips of her toes. Mrs. Sophia Pepper, her aunt, was on her knees in front of the kitchen fire making toast.

"Auntie, dear," Miss Spice gasped, excitedly, "it's Mrs. Kingconstance and Miss Julia."

"Two more spoonfuls of tea," said Mrs. Sophia Pepper.

Miss Spice seized the mustard tin in which the tea was kept, and hastily put two more teaspoonfuls into the teapot. She tilted the tin to the light, and looked into it before she put the lid on, then made a rapid calculation mechanically. The tea was certainly very low; could it possibly be made to hold out till Saturday? Milk and hot water had so very little support in it; but, never mind—hospitality! These things must be done.

Mrs. Sophia Pepper cast a comprehensive glance over her shoulder, which took in the whole situation, then nodded agreement at the kitchen fire.

"Keep what's left for visitors," she said, grimly. "We'll do without."

She might have shared her brains with most of her niece's visitors, giving each enough to inspire respect, and still have had plenty left for herself; yet she, too, suffered from the influences of her environment, and felt it an honor to have such company under her roof. But respect for the position of her niece's guests did not prevent Mrs. Sophia Pepper from summing them up and appraising them on occasion shrewdly.

Miss Spice fluttered back to the drawing-room, holding aloft the buttered toast on a plate in one hand and some slices of cake in the other. She reminded herself of a picture she had seen, when she was in London, of a lovely young lady with nothing worth mentioning on her shoulders, who was holding up to a king a symbolical offering of flowers and fruit. She was also conscious of her streaming hair, and had she seen a reflection of herself with wings in the little Sheraton mirror on the wall opposite the door as she entered the drawing-room, she would hardly have been surprised, so lightly did she seem to skim along in her elation.

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"Oh, Mrs. Kingconstance, have you heard the news?" she burst out. "The stranger!"

She stopped, and blushed and twittered as if the news somehow concerned herself specially, pleasantly, but also much to her modest embarrassment.

Mrs. Kingconstance looked at her out of her great, soft dark eyes, much as a nice, comfortable, well-bred cow looks when in an inquiring mood—not sympathetically, but somewhat suspiciously, as if she expected to be disturbed.

Miss Spice glanced archly at Mrs. Normanton.

"Do tell!" she entreated.

That usually stolid mother of a family at once became animated; so also did Mrs. Japp and Florence. But before another word could be said a carriage stopped at the gate, and a tall, gaunt, but not inelegant gray-haired lady with a hard countenance descended. She looked as if she were coming to pronounce sentence of death on somebody.

"Here's Lady May," said Miss Spice. "I must let her in."

When Lady May was seated, Julia asked, impatiently: "Who's the man, Miss Spice?"

Miss Spice looked at Mrs. Normanton, twittered, blushed, and rounded her eyes in an ecstasy of dumb entreaty.

"It is only a gentleman," Mrs. Normanton said, trying hard not to look as though that were important. "The Swiss Cottage, you know. We have sold it."

"But that is not all!" cried Miss Spice, shaking off her modest embarrassment suddenly in her excitement. "It is sold to a somebody—a *great* man."

Mrs. Kingconstance raised inquiring eyebrows.

"Six feet, at least, and stout in proportion," Mrs. Japp put in.

"Oh, Mrs. Japp, dear!" little Miss Spice remonstrated.

"He is a *fine* man, of course; but there is something

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more than size. There is *mystery*, or I am *much* mistaken."

"Oh, come now, Miss Spice," said Mrs. Normanton, stiffly, resenting the imputation of mystery as something not respectable. "My husband ascertained all that was necessary. You may be sure he would see to that, and have proper references before he sold the house."

"Oh yes," said Miss Spice; "of course we know the squire would not have any one come into the neighborhood without ascertaining. But a gentleman may have the highest references—and that is just it, dear Mrs. Normanton. *This* gentleman's references are so *very* high—they come from such *very* high quarters—that it means mystery. The stranger must be a distinguished man to know such people. Then why is he here? He does not say—he cannot explain; but he accidentally led me to infer—"

"Then you have made his acquaintance?" said Mrs. Kingconstance.

"Yes," said Miss Spice, solemnly; "and I have seen him on two occasions."

"Well, what did he tell you?" Lady May asked, somewhat impatiently.

"Nothing," Miss Spice answered, impressively. "The first time we met we—er—we conversed; the second time he drew from his breast-pocket a lovely miniature—a Cosway, he said. It was the portrait of a beautiful lady in court dress. The likeness was so unmistakable I knew who it was even before he said 'My mother.' I asked—I ventured to ask to see his father's, but he only sighed. 'Ah, my dear Miss Spice,' he said, 'some people have sorrows before they are born.' No, though"—she corrected herself—"I don't think it could have been that exactly. Let me see. Was it 'Some people's sorrows begin before they are born'? Something to that effect, at all events. Now don't you call that mysterious?"

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"It sounds odd, certainly," said Mrs. Kingconstance, helping herself to another slice of buttered toast and turning to Lady May. "Have you seen anything of this new acquisition to the neighborhood? Is he to be received?"

"There can be no question of that," Mrs. Normanton decided.

"A bachelor, and well off!" Mrs. Japp exclaimed, as if the notion of not receiving him were preposterous.

"Oh, and a man of such taste, too!" Miss Spice put in, with a little scream of enthusiasm. "You should have heard him on the subject of Chippendale—the grace, you know."

Miss Spice would not have mentioned the value on any account; but the knowledge that her furniture was good lent her a sense of dignity such as she had never before experienced. She glanced round the room as she spoke, and the other ladies' eyes followed hers in wonder.

"Did he admire these things?" said Florence Japp.

"He did," said Miss Spice, valiantly.

There was a dead silence, then Mrs. Kingconstance observed, with comfortable indifference:

"A gentleman of taste will really be an acquisition to the neighborhood."

"Oh yes," said Miss Spice, fervently. "One does not see many such men. Once in my life, indeed—when I was in London—" She broke off short and sighed, her thoughts having reverted to the Royal Duke to whom she had dropped a courtesy.

"What is the gentleman's name, by-the-way?" Mrs. Kingconstance asked.

"Mr. Jellybond Tinney; but for the present he prefers to be called plain Mr. Jellybond," Miss Spice replied, and then she blushed and simpered. It showed such intimacy to know his wishes in the matter.

"Gracious!" said Mrs. Kingconstance. "Jellybond

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Tinney ? I never knew there was such a name," and she shook her head so that everybody felt that there was something discreditable to Mr. Jellybond Tinney in the fact that Mrs. Kingconstance did not know his name.

On the way home Julia asked her mother what she intended to do with regard to the new-comer.

" Nothing," said Mrs. Kingconstance. " It is all very well for the Normantons to countenance him, especially if he is rich. They have a large family of daughters, and it is important to them to be on friendly terms with him. I am in quite a different position."

She nestled back in her carriage comfortably upon the remark, and began to think of dinner. She was afraid that she had said nothing about a savory. The sweets she remembered discussing, but not the savory. And she did feel that she should especially like a savory that evening—something to tempt the appetite; sweets are so cloying. "Angels on horseback," now—those delicious little morsels of oysters rolled in bacon and served on crisp toast, very hot; and the oysters were in the house.

She sat up with sudden energy and ordered the coachman to drive faster.

" Do you want anything, mamma,?" Julia asked.

" 'Angels on horseback!' " Mrs. Kingconstance ejaculated.

Miss Spice, meantime, was pressing her aunt to eat a bit of cold buttered toast that had been left from tea. Her own evening meal consisted of bread and beef dripping, with a little milk and a good deal of hot water.

CHAPTER X

FOR several days Babs wearied for Cadenhouse, but he did not come. Then she wrote him a stiff little note :

“Mamma desires me to say that she particularly wishes to see you at luncheon to-morrow at 1.30 o'clock.”

Punctually to the moment Lord Cadenhouse arrived. Babs was waiting in the hall to waylay him.

“I thought that would fetch you,” she said

“Do you mean to say—” he was beginning, but she interrupted him.

“Don’t you give me away,” she said, “or there’ll be ructions. And don’t look at the door like that—you’ve been announced. There’s no escape.”

“Babs,” said Lord Cadenhouse, severely, “if you ever play me, such a trick again I shall tell.”

“Oh, all right,” said Babs ; “only come along now and be nice. It was quite true, though. Mamma does wish to see you. She’s always wondering why you don’t come.”

She led the way towards the dining-room, where the rest of the party were already seated. Lord Cadenhouse followed her with his head in the air. On the way it struck Babs that he was exceedingly grave and dignified in appearance. She looked at him admiringly.

“People don’t generally take liberties with you, I should think,” she said.

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"No, they do not," said Cadenhouse.

"Then this must be a nice change for you," she rejoined.

Cadenhouse stiffened perceptibly ; but they were at the dining-room door, and he made no reply.

When he entered, the party was as dull as a north room in midwinter. Mrs. Kingconstance never owned that she was dull. If she felt depressed, she used to say it was debility, and order something nice to eat ; then she would give herself up to the pleasures of anticipation, consumption, and recollection—exercises which she usually found all-sufficing for her comfort. She did not call it comfort when it came, however, but resignation. On this occasion she had just said grace, and was sitting with her head up, in anticipation of the good things to come. Miss Minton and Julia were still suffering from a tussle with a passage of single-patient on the piano, and could not command a smile between them ; while with poor Miss Kingconstance it was one of those days that have to be endured—so different from the days that are lived. The household was too heavily charged with femininity. The accustomed presence of Montacute and his tutor did nothing to relieve the benumbing preponderance of it. An outside influence was necessary, and when Cadenhouse came the effect of his vitality made itself felt immediately. It was like a powerful stimulant that quickens the pulse and sharpens the wits. Julia and Miss Minton smiled at the difficulties of single-patient ; Miss Kingconstance was relieved from her morbid self-consciousness, and wondered how she could have imagined that a certain letter which her sister-in-law had received that morning concerned her ; Mrs. Kingconstance suddenly ceased to feel that she must take something ; and Montacute and his tutor, being infected with the change of mood that was operating

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around them, turned to each other and talked without fear of being snubbed.

Mrs. Kingconstance welcomed Cadenhouse warmly. She had known him all his life, and in his boyhood he had come continually to Dane Court ; but since he had grown up she had seen very little of him. Now, as he sat at table, she inspected him curiously, as also did Miss Kingconstance, with whom he had played about the place not so many years before. Both were conscious of some subtle change in him, which neither could find words to define. As might have been expected, the grave, silent boy had grown into a grave, silent man ; but there was more than that—more than the change from boy to man.

He had one of those faces which have this in common with great statuary, that they bear no impress of age. It is maturity that is typified, maturity at the point of perfection, which makes us think neither of youth nor of age, but pins us to the present with a sense of satisfaction not to be analyzed. Cadenhouse was clean-shaven. His features were regular and refined. He was somewhat pale, but there was a suggestion of high health in his whole appearance. It was his eyes and mouth that marked him more than ordinary. His eyes were dark and bright, but unimpassioned and slow. He seemed to be looking on at life rather than living it. It was as if he were surveying the world from a distance and considering all he saw impartially. His mouth in repose agreed with his eyes, and the finely curved full lips set firmly. But the thing about his face that was most striking was its extraordinary placidity. His whole personality suggested strength ; but it was in the exceeding calm of his mouth that this impression centred. There is a saying that God makes every feature of the face but the mouth—our mouths we make ourselves. Mouths are made or marred by time, trial,

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and habit, softened by heart, hardened by suffering ; but it is to the soul that they owe the finishing touch. The change which the ladies were aware of in Cadenhouse's appearance came from this cause—his soul had set its first fine line upon his mouth to finish it, and already in expression it was beautiful.

Cadenhouse looked round in turn, and noted the changes since he had last been there—the children nearly grown up, their mother more matronly in her beauty, and Miss Kingconstance—Cadenhouse was shocked at the change in her. Miss Kingconstance was a wreck.

"How nice it is to see you here again!" Mrs Kingconstance exclaimed. "Now that you have found your way back, I hope you will come often."

"Oh, he'll come, right enough," said Babs. "I'll answer for him."

"Upon whose authority?" Miss Kingconstance asked.

She smiled as she spoke, and Babs stared at her in astonishment, her face was so beautified. Babs realized how very seldom she had seen her aunt smile.

"What is it you asked me?" she said, recollecting herself. "But never mind. Benson," she called to the butler, "more beef. I don't know what there is about you, Cadenhouse, but you do make me feel hungry."

"You must not speak to Lord Cadenhouse in that familiar way, Babs," her mother admonished her.

"Oh, all right, mother," said Babs, not a bit abashed. "I'll call him 'Good Lord' if he likes. Potatoes, Benson ; nobody seems hungry but me. I say, my Lord Marquis, what shall I call your lordship? You do look nice with that shadow of a smile on your lips. Do you know I like your face awfully. What may I call you, Cadenhouse?"

"I know what Lord Cadenhouse will call you," said Miss Kingconstance.

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"Something nice, as befits his knightliness, I'm sure," Babs rattled on. "My Lord Cadenhouse, thou shalt be mine own true knight, and thou wilt, and I'll give thee a cuff on the visage to wear in token of the same when I have an opportunity."

"Babs, I wish you wouldn't gabble on so," Mrs. Kingconstance remonstrated. "You talk perfect nonsense."

"Even the perfection of nonsense is not to be heard every day," said Babs, turning her attention to the side-board.

Mrs. Kingconstance smiled, proud mother, indulgent at Cadenhouse.

"What a lovely day for the Normantons' party!" Julia remarked.

"Oh yes. By-the-way," said Mrs. Kingconstance, "are you coming, Lorraine?"

"I've not decided," her sister-in-law replied; "but if I go, I shall drive myself there."

"Then which of you children will come with me?" Mrs. Kingconstance asked.

"I won't," said Babs.

"That's flat," said Montacute.

"I cannot call it polite," his mother observed.

"'Polergize," said Babs. "When I'm a young lady I'll go to garden-parties and 'at homes,' but not now. My youth preserves me!"

"Babs doesn't like parties," Mrs. Kingconstance somewhat superfluously explained to Cadenhouse in plaintive tones.

"No, I don't," said Babs. "It's all dilly-dally-dawdle, and nobody at their nicest."

"Is it altogether their fault if they take no notice of you?" Julia asked, suavely.

"They take too much notice of me," Babs answered. "That's what I complain of, because it is not to please me that they do it. Nobody wants to please anybody."

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Everybody wants to make up to somebody more important than themselves. They begin with me when they want to arrive at mamma. Isn't it so, Aunt Lorraine?"

Mrs. Kingconstance smiled significantly and shrugged her shoulders.

"I can't stand that kind of thing," Babs pursued. "If people want to know me, they must know me for myself; they must be nice to me because it's right to be nice, and they must be nice to every deserving person in my neighborhood. Unkindness gets into the atmosphere, I think; I always shrivel up when somebody else is snubbed, and somebody is always being snubbed hereabouts. I do hate the inhumanity of the county—not of the smart people so much—they don't count; but of the pious people."

"Don't say 'shrivel up,' Babs," her mother remonstrated. "You do use such strange expressions. I cannot think where you get them. Lady May was talking only the other day about the deplorable deterioration of young people in regard to their language. She says she hears nothing now but slang."

"Then I dare say she speaks the truth for once," said Babs. "Everybody knows she's gone gray in her efforts to get into the slangiest set in the country. She was born among the pious people, but she would be born again into the smart set; and the smart set would not let her in quite, and the pious people wouldn't have her back, so now she is nothing but a hoverer on the outside edge of both sets, and she only sees enough of each to excite her ire."

Miss Kingconstance sighed.

"There is something in atmosphere," she said. "I am thinking of what Babs was saying about unkindness getting into the atmosphere. To-day there is a strange sense of peace."

Cadenhouse looked at her thoughtfully.

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"Is there really such a thing as moral atmosphere?" she pursued.

"So it is said," Cadenhouse rejoined.

"But what is it?"

"An atmosphere composed of good thoughts," he suggested. "I have heard it argued that thoughts are things, and also that thought is creative."

"Then if that be so," she concluded, "one might easily conceive that when our thoughts are pleasant, all around us there will be a space of pleasantness and peace; but if they are unpleasant, every one in our near neighborhood will suffer discomfort."

"But isn't it so?" said Cadenhouse. "Get several unpleasant-minded people together, and see how they upset you. If you lived with such people long enough your health and spirits would be both impaired. The first germ of disease was propagated in a malicious mind by an evil thought."

"What a pity our doctors don't pursue that line of research!" Miss Kingconstance exclaimed.

"Oh, I say, Aunt Lorraine," said Babs, "how nice you look, sitting up so, and all flushed."

Everybody looked at Miss Kingconstance.

"Really, this is embarrassing," she remonstrated.

But it was true that she looked well. Something was rousing her out of her valetudinarian state and filling her with new life.

"You do look well, dear," Mrs. Kingconstance said. "Do you feel so?"

"I am feeling that there is something to live for. A novel sensation," Miss Kingconstance answered, energetically.

"The word 'novel' reminds me," said her inconsequent sister-in-law. "Can you recommend anything, Cadenhouse?—new books, I mean."

"For yourself?" he asked.

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"Yes, and for the girls, too."

"Not for me," said Babs. "You'll not catch me reading books."

"As if you could read anything else," said Julia.

"Don't be shallow, jeering Julia," Babs retorted. "Have you never heard of reading the hearts of men?"

The corners of Cadenhouse's mouth relaxed once more.

"Come, come, children, don't be rude to each other," Mrs. Kingconstance said.

"We're not rude, mamma," said Babs. "I'm always explaining that. It's only our way of taking intellectual exercise."

"Babs is going to set up for a wit," said Julia.

"What am I going to set up on, Julia?" Babs asked.

"The haystack of your attempts that have failed?"

"I think I hear the carriage, mamma," said Julia.

"Dear me!" Mrs. Kingconstance exclaimed.

"Be calm, mamma," said Babs. "When you begin to fuss there is such a disturbance in the moral atmosphere we are all upset."

"It really is time we dressed," Mrs. Kingconstance said, looking at Cadenhouse apologetically. "I am afraid we must go. It is quite a long drive. But perhaps you are coming to the party?"

"No," said Cadenhouse. "I regret er—"

"Oh, all right, *we* know," said Babs. "That's just the way I feel—previous engagement, and that kind of thing. But you are not going away yet. Come and converse. I've heaps of things to say, and I want to ask you questions. I love to converse, don't you?"

"Don't worry Lord Cadenhouse, Babs," Mrs. Kingconstance adjured her.

"Worry him, mamma! Gracious, look at him! If he were not so haughty he'd be grinning. Wouldn't you, Cadenhouse?"

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Cadenhouse smiled, and Mrs. Kingconstance hurried off, followed by Julia. Miss Kingconstance strolled away, too ; the others had already disappeared.

" Now," said Babs, heaving a deep sigh, " where shall we go, and what shall we talk about ? Come on to the terrace, it's so fine."

He followed her out through the windows, and they began to walk up and down together, he with his hands clasped behind him, listening for the most part, she swinging her arms and gesticulating as she talked.

" Not that it matters what we discuss," she pursued. " The great thing is to keep on talking and looking at each other, and smiling, and that sort of thing, don't you know. You must feel pleasantly disposed towards me, and I'll feel pleasantly disposed towards you ; and then we shall be all right together. We shall be charging the moral atmosphere with a double dose of good things all the time."

" That is the secret of social success," said Cadenhouse. " How did you arrive at it, Babs ?"

" Oh, I don't know," she answered, casually. " It's just come to me out of your moral atmosphere remarks, I think."

" You must be a singularly apt pupil," he observed.

" Miss Minton wouldn't say so," she rejoined. " But don't you try to teach me things. I don't want to learn. I know already that two and two make four, but I don't feel any the better for it."

" What do you mean by better ?"

" Can't say," said Babs.

" By ' can't say ' do you mean you don't know ?"

" No," she answered, decidedly. " In myself I know, only I can't—" She pulled some leaves from a shrub and began to shred them to pieces, hesitating for a word.

" You can't express it," he suggested.

She nodded.

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"The kind of thing my governess teaches me—no, not the things, not the facts themselves, but what she wants me to think about the facts—that's it, or as near as I can come to it—all that kind of teaching seems to put out something else that I have in me which is much more enthralling, much better worth cultivating, than my mind. There's more pleasure in it, too, and more power. When I hear of Henry VIII. and his wives, it only makes me think horrid thoughts; but when some one says something like—like—

"For, while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main,"

I feel—oh!" She hugged herself. "You don't see much in that, perhaps; but there *is*. There is infinity in it. When it comes into my mind, I glow and am glad. I expand. There is pleasure in every inch of me; and it is as if I filled out and grew bigger, so that there might be more inches of me to be resolved into bliss. And why? Not for the words themselves, certainly, but for what they contain."

"How do you mean, Babs?"

"What there is in them, you know," she answered.

"But what is there in them?"

"Why, man, there is *hope* in them, isn't there?" She opened wide blue eyes upon him, as though amazed that she should have to tell him. "I suppose you know what hope is?" she inquired, ironically.

"It is something different in each case," he answered. "How do you define it?"

"As a foretaste, for one thing," she answered. "It is our first glimmering of good things in store for us; it is pleasant expectation. No one can be quite wretched who has something to look forward to. But it doesn't

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last long, does it? I wish it did—hope, I mean. It so soon becomes certainty, because of that something else, you know, in one's self—in *myself*, which, when I greatly desire anything, gives me an assurance—makes me know whether I shall get it or not. But sometimes it keeps me in suspense," she qualified, "because I cannot command it."

"What is it like, Babs — that 'something else'?" Cadenhouse asked, greatly interested.

Babs looked out afar, as if to the horizon; but Cadenhouse saw that it was the inward vision that shone in her eyes.

"It has to do with tokens, signs, wonders, premonitions, and such like foolishness, as people call it. And there is, besides, the voice—the voice that speaks to me—*here*," she clasped her hands on her chest—"here, in myself, directing me."

They took a turn in silence.

"Babs," said Cadenhouse, at last, impressively—"Babs, do you know that those whom that voice addresses are called to be of the elect?"

"I know nothing," said Babs. "But those are the things that I want to know. I want to know about this pleasure, and this power—this something in me. Is it to be cultivated? Can I get at it to control it?"

"Of a surety."

"How?"

"By self-denial, by teaching, by training, by leading the life. But you are too young, Babs," he broke off. "By-and-by, when you are older, you shall hear more of these things."

"But if I lead the life, will *all that* cease to be vague and elusive?"

"*All that*, I promise you, will become as clear as the piece of knowledge you scoffed at just now—the

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fact that two and two make four. But I must leave you ; it is getting late."

"No, no," she pleaded. "Do stay—do tell me more."

She clasped her hands round his arm in her eagerness to detain him, and raised her angelic face to his.

Cadenhouse hastily disengaged his arm and fled.

Miss Kingconstance had come out onto the terrace in time to witness this last little scene.

"St. Anthony !" she said.

Babs retired to the library to look up St. Anthony in order to make out the purport of the allusion.

CHAPTER XI

MEANWHILE Julia and her mother drove through the balmy country lanes to Normanton. The cold spring had advanced to early summer suddenly. The fruit trees were in blossom, and the birds were singing blithely.

"Mamma," said Julia, "is Lord Cadenhouse in love with Babs?"

"My dear child, Babs is not yet out of the school-room!" Mrs. Kingconstance exclaimed. There was a look of complacency on her face, however, when she had spoken, which showed that the suggestion was not unpleasant.

"How do you know when a man is in love with you, mamma?"

"Oh, he tells you."

"How does he tell you?"

"Really, Julia—" Mrs. Kingconstance quite blushed.

"I suppose you understand him, at all events, when the time comes," Julia put in, to make it easier for her mother.

"Oh dear, yes! There is no mistaking a man in that mood."

"I am glad of that. Because, if a man proposed to me—a really good match, you know—and I didn't understand, and drove him away, as they do in the books sometimes, I should be horridly disgusted."

The carriage swept up the drive to Normanton Hall and set them down under the pillared portico. Several

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other carriages were standing about empty. It seemed as if the whole county had already arrived, and the house was overflowing ; for the genial weather was tempting the people out into the grounds, and they were making a garden-party of it. As usual at all such gatherings thereabouts, there was a depressing preponderance of ladies. A sprinkling of youths not old enough to count as yet, and a few elderly gentlemen of superannuated design, who were looked upon as institutions rather than as men by the ladies, did their best to leaven the monotonous femininity of the assembly, and with unwonted success, as it seemed, for the animation that prevailed was extraordinary. The countenances of the ladies beamed. Even the dullest perked about, talking to each other with a faint display of interest, just as they do at parties on the stage. Only one stimulus could cause such a stir in that forlorn feminine community, but it would have been hard for a new-comer to determine the source of it, so sedulously did the ladies confine their attentions to each other and restrain their glances from wandering. Fanny Sturdy was making Florence Japp laugh immoderately just as the Dane Court carriage pulled up, and Ally Spice, in gray and blue, looking ineffable, twittered about conspicuously. It should have done everybody's heart good to see a fellow-creature in such a state of bliss, but some of the dolorous dowagers who drank Miss Spice's tea and ate her buttered toast when it suited their own convenience and pleasure felt anything but pleased to see her so. When she minueted up to them with her nervous smile you would have thought she had taken a liberty. It was all very well to ask her on these occasions, of course, but it was quite another thing for her to expect to be countenanced. From the younger ladies, however, in whom hope of change was not yet extinguished, and for whom life still seemed to contain some promise of

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joy, Miss Spice was receiving the most exhilarating consideration that day. It was her moment, and she was enjoying it thoroughly. Florence Japp and Fanny Sturdy took possession of her now.

"Ally, tell us about him—do!" said Fanny Sturdy, and then they tittered, all three of them, as at something exceedingly whimsical.

Mr. Normanton hurried down the steps to hand Mrs. Kingconstance from her carriage. He was a red-faced, fussy little man, a sort of as-it-was-in-the-beginning-is-now-and-ever-shall-be little man, whose conversation revolved in a cycle of commonplaces. All the days of his life he had conducted himself like a decent country gentleman, so far as anybody knew, and at night he drank too much whiskey.

"How are you, Mrs. Kingconstance?" he exclaimed, with effusion. "So good of you to come! Jolly day, isn't it? You'll find all your friends here. Take my arm and come and have some tea. Jarvis, take Miss Julia."

Julia looked anything but enthusiastic, for Jarvis Normanton was only about twenty, and no great catch. Somebody of maturer years and with fairer prospects would have pleased her better.

The tea-rooms were crowded, and Mrs. Kingconstance preferred to sit in the hall. There she became instantly aware of the presence of a tall gentleman of distinguished appearance whom she did not recognize.

"Who is that?" she asked.

"Oh, you know," Mr Normanton replied, glancing over his shoulder at him. "What's the fellow's name? Always forget it. Looks rather out of it, doesn't he? New to the neighborhood, you know—hasn't met many people yet. Interesting man—seen a good deal. Shall I introduce him?"

Before Mrs. Kingconstance could reply, he had hur-

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ried away, and was returning with the distinguished-looking stranger.

"Mrs. Kingconstance, let me introduce—" Mumble, mumble, was what followed ; but Mrs. Kingconstance bowed graciously, and the salutation of the distinguished-looking stranger was profound.

"I have heard of Mrs. Kingconstance," he observed, and Mrs. Kingconstance felt that volumes could not convey all the admirable things concerning her that were in his mind at the moment.

"Oh !" she said, archly. "I am afraid some one has been creating a prejudice."

"Yes," he solemnly rejoined ; "a prejudice which has made me—*long*—for this moment."

A pleasurable sensation laid hold of Mrs. Kingconstance.

"You have the advantage of me," she said, smiling up at him brightly.

"Yes," he answered again, unexpectedly ; "*I* have the privilege of making *your* acquaintance. To meet me is to meet a mere nobody—a poor traveller who has seen something, certainly ; but what of that ? A man may spend his life in seeking distraction, and may even secure distinction ; but with what object ? He returns to civilization, and, lo ! there is a beautiful woman ! She has never left her home ; she has done nothing—she has no need to do anything ; she has only to be herself. And all the man's honors are laid at her feet. He offers them all—to win a smile. May I take your cup ?"

Mrs. Kingconstance surrendered the cup.

"Of course," she said, "it is exactly as you say—fortunately for women. We have only to be ourselves."

"Ah !" the distinguished-looking stranger ejaculated, and again he expressed volumes. But he was towering above Mrs. Kingconstance as she sat there on a centre ottoman, and there was awkwardness in the attitude.

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"Won't you sit down?" she said, considerately.

He bowed low, and then drew up a chair.

"I came from Paris last," he observed. "What wonderful people the French are! You must go to France for the refinements of life. Here we are rich, lavish, extravagant. We have everything, but we have too much of it. We gorge. Our houses are gorged with furniture, our walls with pictures, our tables with flowers, our shop windows with heterogeneous collections of incongruous articles; and when we give a dinner, we gorge our friends with foods and wines. The Japanese offer you one picture at a time to contemplate, one flower. The French provoke your appetite with one dish; but that dish is perfect—you never forget it. You would go back to Paris for the pleasure of eating it, and wait for it till—er—till it was ready. It is in Paris you realize what daintiness is, what refinement is in food. Each *plat* has its own æsthetic value. Give us Paris, I say, before we grow old—Paris and a *cordons bleu*, Paris and *la haute cuisine*—the good things of this world, so as, in due time, we may enjoy them."

He spoke slowly, rounding each word as if it were in itself a delicious morsel to be swallowed as soon as pronounced.

There was something highly exhilarating to Mrs. Kingconstance in these allusions to the *haute cuisine*. It was essentially the proper thing to discuss in connection with Paris, as seen by the affluent and cultivated. To know what French cooking is was an introduction in itself; and Mrs. Kingconstance was so thoroughly interested that she was about to become expansive, when the stranger suddenly rose, excused himself, and went direct to greet the gaunt, gray Lady May, who had just entered the hall.

Other people came up and began to talk to Mrs. Kingconstance, and she was obliged to respond to their atten-

tions ; but all they said fell very flat after the brilliant remarks of the distinguished-looking stranger, and she hoped that he would return to her. He did not, however. He took no more notice of her, in fact, and she was somewhat piqued. It was so seldom she met a man who was interesting, and this was evidently a thorough man of the world. Paris, Japan, the *haute cuisine*—he might be an ambassador ! She must get him to call upon her.

“ How do you like Mr. Jellybond ? ” Mrs Normanton broke in upon her meditations.

“ Oh, that was Mr. Jellybond, was it ? ” said Mrs. Kingconstance. “ I’m so glad you’ve had such a delightful day for your party. Where is Julia, I wonder ? It is time we were going. Is Miss Spice still here ? Ah, there she is. Miss Spice, may I offer you a seat in my carriage ? ”

“ Really, Mrs. Kingconstance,” Miss Spice twittered, excitedly, “ you are *too* kind.”

The poor little woman was quite overcome. In another moment she would be whirled away before *his* admiring eyes by prancing horses in a splendid carriage—her very dream. All her dreams were coming true at once ! She had one moment’s panic—lest he should not see her depart ; but there he was under the portico, waiting to hand her—them—in. And how he bowed as they drove off ! Three bows, one for each of them. Julia never thought of giving up her seat beside her mother, so poor little Miss Spice had to take the back seat ; but that was an advantage, because she could see him standing there, with his heels clicked together, clasping his hat to his heart, till the turn hid the house and him from sight.

“ How *very* kind of you ! ” she ejaculated once more, in a happy flow of gratitude.

“ Not at all,” said Mrs. Kingconstance. “ By-the-way,

what was it you were telling us the other day about Mr. Jellybond? You know him very well, don't you?"

Miss Spice blushed, simpered, and began; and before they reached the cottage at the cross roads, Mrs. Kingconstance was in possession of all that Miss Spice knew, hoped, and suspected.

Miss Spice was too excited to go in when Mrs. Kingconstance left her at the Cross Roads Cottage. She waited at the garden gate till the carriage was out of sight, and then she picked up her mouse-gray skirts between the finger and thumb of each hand, extended her arms, and so seemed to sail away down the road which led to the village. She did not know what possessed her, but she felt she must take that road.

It was an enchanting scene. Low down on the horizon the setting sun shone out, casting long shadows of the old gnarled trees upon the grass, and changing the heavy atmosphere of the late afternoon into a luminous green haze. There was a strange hush over the land. Horses and oxen stood motionless in the fields, and the birds were still. Miss Spice herself was the only moving thing, and she felt as if the medium which held her were something other than the air of earth. She was in a tense state, a state of expectation. Nothing that might have happened would have surprised her; only if nothing had happened would she have been surprised. But something did happen; for presently, down the long lane, under the old elm-trees, she saw her hero approaching. She felt that the world stood still in suspense to see them meet.

He took off his hat and held it high to greet her.

"Ah, dear lady," he said, "what a happy coincidence! The world is not such a weary place as the dolorous misanthropes would have us suppose. I was just thinking about you."

"Indeed!" said Miss Spice.

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"Yes. But permit me to accompany you back." Miss Spice turned about as on a pivot. "Your way—the way you came—is much sweeter than my way. Now is it not a strange coincidence that we should both have come out for a little stroll this evening? I wanted to see you. I was on my way to call upon you. But how much better this is—to meet here—in the untrammelled open. It is an ill wind that blows—er—nowhere. You enjoyed the party?"

"Oh yes, *indeed*."

"And the drive home with that lady, Mrs.—er—"

"Mrs. Kingconstance."

"Thank you, yes. I remember now—Mrs. Kingconstance. A widow, is she not?"

"Yes, in her own right," said Miss Spice. "I mean—"
She did not know what she meant.

The path was narrow. The evening was closing in. Mr. Jellybond looked about him. There was nobody in sight.

"You must be fatigued," he said. "Take my arm."

Without waiting for her consent, he drew her hand through his arm in a masterful way, and held it there.

Miss Spice nearly swooned. Then she was conscious of a delicious glow. The firm clasp of his large hand stimulated her feeble circulation. She had begun life with a healthy appetite for everything, and had suffered from enforced abstinence, from semi-starvation of every function and every faculty. But now, in a moment, she felt alive for once—only too much alive. She was intoxicated, irresponsible.

They walked on together in silence for a little, then he gave her hand a little squeeze.

"I suppose you discussed the people and the party all the way home?" he observed.

"We discussed *one* person," she answered, archly.

"Ah! Was there only one worth discussing?" he asked.

She smiled up at him. He was holding his head high in the air, as usual, but saw her out of the corner of his eye. Little Miss Spice was transfigured. Her nerves had helped themselves to his vitality, her youth was renewed. For the moment she was worth looking at, and Mr. Jellybond smiled down upon her.

"Were you defending the luckless stranger against a prejudiced person in your own sweet womanly way?" he asked.

"There was no need to defend," said Miss Spice. "I had only to satisfy natural interest. Every prejudice has been swept away by the stranger's own charming personality."

"I fear it was curiosity, not interest, the lady showed," he said, sadly. "It is hard to be misunderstood."

"Oh no, I assure you," said little Miss Spice, eager to console. "She said something—something about an acquisition to the neighborhood—she did, indeed. She hopes to see you again."

Mr. Jellybond surveyed the heavens.

"How sweet the shade is here, under the trees!" he ejaculated; "and how sweet the evening calm! It steals over us, drawing us closer." He put his arm round her and pressed her to his side. "Ah!" he sighed audibly.

Miss Spice's head sank upon his shoulder. This was love at last.

Once more, cautiously, the dear man looked round, and then, the coast being clear, he raised her little, glorified face to his, and imprinted a kiss on her lips.

CHAPTER XII

HESITANCY was not one of Mr. Jellybond's weaknesses. The very next day he called at Dane Court, and was shown into the big drawing-room. The sun shone bright outside, but the room was shady, with half-drawn blinds, and there was no one in it. It was a fine apartment—one of a suite, from which it was curtained off. Mr. Jellybond looked about him admiringly ; then, as no one appeared, he began to walk about on tiptoe—a way he had—examining and peeping into everything, but more like an auctioneer appraising the value than a virtuoso admiring the beauty of the objects. He touched the frames of pictures, studied the signatures of the artists who had painted them, rather than the subjects, ran his fingers lightly down china vases, balanced bits of lacquer to test their weight, took off the lids of boxes and peered in, and felt the texture of the rich silk hangings ; and all with incredible speed and agility, considering his age and size. Ordinarily he moved with extreme deliberation, but during these first few minutes alone in the great drawing-room at Dane Court he skipped about like a school-boy, and the effect was pleasantly incongruous.

Presently he became conscious of some movement in the next apartment, and stopped short in his gambols. He was extremely watchful by nature, and even slight commotions, which other people would not have noticed, seldom escaped him. Being near a picture hung

low on the wall, he instantly fell into the attitude of a connoisseur, and, stooping, peered into it through his double gold-rimmed eyeglass with rapt attention. But his ears were open. It would be more accurate, however, to say that he felt rather than heard the faint *frou-frou* of trailing drapery, and became aware of a leisurely footfall. With an easy, natural gesture, as if he had satisfied his interest in the picture, he folded his eyeglass and turned round. He had expected to see Mrs. Kingconstance, but found himself face to face with a tall, slight, elegant lady in fawn-colored draperies who was eying him critically. Mr. Jellybond was unprepared for this vision. He had not heard of Miss Kingconstance. But Miss Kingconstance had heard a good deal about him, and was prepared to be favorably impressed.

One of the saddest parts of the sufferings of women so situated—women, that is to say, without one solid aim or satisfying occupation in life—is the cruel ache of expectancy that chronically besets them. Their days are empty, and all their yearnings unappeased. The strongest side of their nature, being artificially suppressed, becomes an importunate agitator, always on the lookout for occasions on which to assert itself ; and any man may make the occasion. Their hope is therefore towards every man who may chance to come into their lives. Poor little Miss Spice was bound to succumb to the first who held his arms out to her. She was incapable of criticism. Her nature was largely loving, her faith and charity were excessive, her knowledge of life *nil*.

Miss Kingconstance was of another temperament. Miss Spice, by making peace-offerings of her amiable little heart to everybody about her, had reaped the reward of those who give, and so kept her mind sweet and wholesome ; the ache of expectancy she eased with pleasant day-dreams, in which was never a villain. Miss

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Kingconstance had no such resource. The life of suppression had told upon the softer side of her nature and embittered her. She had ceased to care ; she found no solace either in loving or in being loved ; all her heart was concentrated on a great craving for she knew not what, and because this great craving was unappeased she felt herself an ill-used woman, and was more apt to owe a grudge than to offer affection. Her self-consciousness, grown morbid, was forever on the alert, looking into other people's defects, and suspecting them of evil intent towards herself. But it was this survival of her critical faculty that saved her from the danger which threatened Miss Spice.

Miss Kingconstance might hope to find her hero in every man she met, but she was not to be imposed upon by mock heroics, even when, as in the case of Mr. Jellybond, she was prepared to be favorably impressed.

Her first impression of him was not unsatisfactory ; he was really a fine-looking man of a portly kind, clean shaven, and of dignified demeanor. He was dressed like a country gentleman, only the costume, if anything, was too scrupulously exact. He looked like a country gentleman on the stage, everything he wore was so exceedingly correct.

He bowed low to Miss Kingconstance. She acknowledged the salute stiffly, then sank into a chair.

" Mr. Jellybond ?" she observed.

" Yes, madam," he rejoined, bowing again profoundly ; then, in the hope of discovering who she was, he remarked : " You have the advantage of me, if I may venture to say so."

" Yes," she answered, in her languid drawl, still fixing him with hard eyes. " Sit down, please."

Mr. Jellybond obeyed.

A pause ensued.

When one is with a stranger to whom one ought to be

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talking, silence teases the brain ; it is an effort to break it, and tiresome to let it continue. But Mr. Jellybond cast about in his mind vainly for something to say. He was in the awkward position of not knowing where he was with this strange lady. She came to the rescue.

"How do you find it here?" she said. "Can you keep yourself quiet?"

"Oh yes, thank you—tolerably," he stammered.

"That's right," she said. "Quiet is my mania just now. Every sound gets on my nerves—even the grit of my own teeth when I crunch anything crisp. I wish we could inhale our dinners."

"Indeed," said he, with an air of deep interest, but utterly at a loss.

"You take me too seriously," said Miss Kingconstance. "Couldn't you see that that was nonsense? Is nobody ever flippant in your family?"

"Ah, in my family," he answered, solemnly, then sighed, preparatory to trying the tactics which had succeeded so well with the guileless Miss Spice. "In my family there were circumstances—sorrowful circumstances, I may say—which effectually silenced—"

"Well, don't silence me with them," Miss Kingconstance interrupted. "I want to hear about agreeable things. Tell me about yourself. What does a man's family matter, after all?"

"Quite so," said Mr. Jellybond. "Personal experience is the most instructive—"

"Oh, don't instruct me," said Miss Kingconstance. "I want to be amused."

He set a large smile upon his face, and braced himself to the task.

"Seeing you as you are now," said Miss Kingconstance, "makes me think of a passage in Browning."

He looked gratified.

"Yes," Miss Kingconstance proceeded:

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“ ‘Oh, good, gigantic smile o’ the brown old earth
This autumn morning.’ ”

All the complacency went out of Mr. Jellybond’s face.

“ What an extinguisher ! ” said Miss Kingconstance. “ I want to know why it is, when one is reminded of a quotation by a person, and says so, the person always expects something nice ? ”

“ I wonder, ” was all that his elephantine wit accomplished.

Miss Kingconstance laughed.

“ You missed an opportunity there, ” she said.

“ Indeed, ” said Mr. Jellybond, feeling more and more uncomfortable.

“ Yes ; you should have risen to the occasion with another quotation. You should have said reproachfully that, had you told me what passage *I* reminded *you* of, it would have been something *very* different. Then I should have pressed you to tell me, and, after a little coquettish diffidence, you might have said that I inspired

“ ‘The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.’ ”

or something to that effect.”

“ Oh, really, yes, ” said Mr. Jellybond, busy making a mental note of the position for future emergencies.

“ There you are again, ” said Miss Kingconstance, leaning back in her chair and laughing softly. “ That’s another opportunity lost ! ”

“ I fail to see— ” Mr. Jellybond began, in his most ponderous manner.

“ Oh, obviously ! ” said Miss Kingconstance. “ Why, my good man, when I made that quotation, you could

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have remedied your first mistake with three words. When I had suggested to you that I inspired

“ ‘The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow,’

you had only to answer with a convincing affectation of earnestness, ‘So you do!’ and behold your error repaired. I should have smiled coyly at the compliment, and cordially at your aptness. Aptness is inspiring. The bucolic mind to which we are accustomed here is not apt to gambol. I am asking myself what on earth brought you here?”

“My life has been eventful,” he answered. “I seek peace and quietness, and leisure for study and the pursuit of art.”

“Green-grocers, when they have made their money, come into the country to cultivate contentment and cab-bages,” Miss Kingconstance pursued, ignoring the interruption. “But you were not a green-grocer, I should say. Now what were you?”

“A great traveller,” he answered, with a ring of sadness in his voice. “*I come from going to and fro in the earth and from wandering up and down in it.*”

“Only, I suppose, you went for commercial purposes?” said Miss Kingconstance.

“Heaven forbid!” said Mr. Jellybond.

“Why?”

Mr. Jellybond, at a loss for a reason, uttered a pained ejaculation.

“You make a noise like a wondering hen,” said Miss Kingconstance. “But there, I won’t torment you. I quite understand about your having been a great traveller; nobody could call you a little one; and on the same principle you will be a great acquisition to the neighborhood, as my sister-in-law says. You will make amusement for me, too. My wits are always at their

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best when I have a solid substance to strike them on. You positively make me sparkle."

The words were light, but there was a bored look in her face as she uttered them, and she glanced round as if she were casting about in her own mind for an excuse to escape.

A footman entered at the moment, and announced that Mrs. Kingconstance would be pleased to see Mr. Jellybond if he would "be good enough to step this way."

He arose with alacrity.

"You certainly are no courtier," Miss Kingconstance observed.

Perceiving that he had failed for the third time to rise to the occasion, he bowed low before her, looked into her face a moment sourly, then followed the footman out of the room in dignified silence. It was a clever exit, and Miss Kingconstance appreciated it. His very coat-tails wagged with offended dignity. She felt that she had gone too far, and was disconcerted. His self-restraint commanded her respect whether she would or not. "But I don't believe in you, all the same," she reflected, petulantly, "and why you are being received in the boudoir, the inner sanctum reserved for intimates—you, a new-comer, whom nobody knows anything about as yet—I cannot conceive. My dear sister-in-law, you should be more circumspect."

In the boudoir a very different reception awaited Mr. Jellybond. The cosey richness of the room, with its silken draperies, deep-seated easy-chairs, great down cushions, pictures, china, ormolu, and buhl, all aglow in the cheery light of a scented cedar-wood fire, and the handsome lady's cordial greeting set him at his ease at once. This was luxury at last, the kind of luxury to which he had always aspired—high-bred, perfect—



“‘YOU ARE QUITE A PALMIST’”

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the real thing ! Mrs. Kingconstance saw admiration in his face, deep and reverential ; she saw also that he was a fine-looking man under fifty, and she glowed as she had not glowed for years.

The conversation was all smiles. In a very short time Mrs. Kingconstance was absolutely flirting, and she knew it, and liked it, naughty lady ! The mere presence of this burly stranger, from out of the unknown, animated her more than all the homage she had ever received from the county gentlemen round about. They proceeded to discuss many good things, including good cooking. Mr. Jellybond professed to be an excellent cook. Mrs. Kingconstance really could not believe it. He offered to cook a little dinner in her honor one day to prove it—any day she would fix—if she would deign to visit his small abode. Glancing round he perceived that she was fond of pretty things, and he had some few pretty things himself—*objets d'art*—which he would venture to say might interest her.

But now, really, could he cook ? How had he learned it ?

“ I think every gentleman should know how to cook,” he answered, playfully.

Mrs. Kingconstance used her beautiful hands a good deal in talking, and Mr. Jellybond's eyes rested on them incessantly. She could not help observing this. The fixity of his gaze positively embarrassed her at last, and she sought modestly to make her hands less conspicuous by folding them.

“ Ah, that is unkind,” he said, then he sighed heavily. “ Shall I tell you why I cannot take my eyes off your hands ? You would never guess the reason. It is not because they are so beautiful—that one can see at a glance ; it is not because they are kind, although I am sure they are kind ; it is not for the mesmeric quality there so often is in a beautiful woman's hands ; it is because

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they are exactly the same shape as my mother's were. She was a very lovely woman, exquisitely proportioned—I may say it without offence, I hope—and your hand exactly resembles hers—”

“How strange!” said Mrs. Kingconstance, much touched.

“Exactly, so far as I can see. May I look at the palm?”

Mrs. Kingconstance held out her soft pink palm with a coy little smile. Mr. Jellybond gazed into it.

“The lines, so far as I can see, are not similar,” he observed; “but may I just—”

“Oh, certainly,” she answered, with an affectation of not being affected about it.

He took her hand in his, respectfully, squeezed it together to make one line clearer, opened it out to see another.

“You are quite a palmist,” said Mrs. Kingconstance. “Do tell me my fate!”

“N-no, I am not a palmist—not quite,” he answered. “I only know enough to see something unusual in your hand. I cannot tell what it is. I should very much like to know.”

He clasped her hand in both of his, and held it so, absently.

“So should I,” said Mrs. Kingconstance, making a feint to withdraw it and blushing.

He bent towards her and lowered his voice confidentially, taking a firm grip of her hand as though to emphasize his words.

“I know a palmist,” he said, “an excellent one.”

“Oh, do you?” she ejaculated, making another little move to withdraw her hand.

He opened it and looked into it again.

“Of course it is great nonsense,” he declared; “but I should so like to know what these lines mean. I have something of the same kind in my own hand.”

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"Have you really?" said Mrs. Kingconstance. "Of course one doesn't believe in that kind of thing; but just for fun, you know."

"Oh, quite so—just for fun," he echoed.

Then he restored her hand to her.

"Where does your palmist live?" she inquired.

"I hardly know, but if I come across her—"

"Let me know, just for fun."

They smiled at each other again, confidentially, and Mrs. Kingconstance stroked her own hand. The poor thing felt quite out in the cold, somehow, since it had been restored to her.

Mrs. Kingconstance continued to smile long after Mr. Jellybond withdrew. She walked up and down the room reflecting, and several times she stopped and looked at herself in a mirror, and patted her beautiful abundant black hair with the palms of her hands, and felt well pleased with herself.

And Mr. Jellybond was also well pleased.

CHAPTER XIII

THE immediate consequence of Mrs. Kingconstance's cordiality was that doors which would have been obstinately shut to Mr. Jellybond, and others which would have been only half-opened, were flung wide, and he found himself received without suspicion into the best set in the county. Thereupon he blossomed forth magnificently. The Swiss Cottage became a show-place, and it was as if the vale itself had expanded to make room for it, so much space did it occupy in the estimation of every one. In general conversation even Cadenhouse became a secondary subject, all the interest being concentrated on Mr. Jellybond ; his appearance, so suggestive of the grand manner ; his habits, which were said to be highly refined ; and his house, which rumor filled, furnished, and decorated with every evidence of the most fastidious taste, as taste was understood in the neighborhood. It is true that there were gentlemen who spoke of him as " that fellow Jellybond " in a patronizing way, and also as the " gorgeous Jellybond " sarcastically, behind his back ; but there was a certain dignity about the man, due to his fine appearance and grave demeanor, which effectually checked any inclination to take liberties when he was present. Ladies, who would certainly have tried to make him useful in the tame-cat capacity but for his impressive mien, found themselves forced to respect him. To all women, in public, his manner was reverential, but in private—well, he had acquired the art of answering to expectation. He

knew just how to make himself agreeable. Sometimes he was at a loss, as in the case of Miss Kingconstance ; but his extreme natural caution saved him from making mistakes, and as a rule he succeeded with quite opposite characters, just as he had succeeded with Miss Spice and Mrs. Kingconstance.

On his way back from that first visit to Dane Court he overtook Miss Spice. After that little episode the evening before, she had naturally expected him to come and see her, and had waited at home the whole afternoon in a delightful state of agitation. She felt herself as good as engaged to him already, but the words had yet to be spoken. She did not doubt, however, but that they would be spoken in the course of that happy day, and at first she was all in a blissful tremor. She spent the morning at the lattice, as is the way with love-lorn ladies, and felt that all was as it should be ; but as the slow hours slipped round, her mind misgave her. Late in the afternoon, however, Florence Japp came in and mentioned that she had met him, and he had told her that he was on his way to pay a duty call at Dane Court. That saved the situation so far as Miss Spice's feelings were concerned. Of course he must do his duty. When Florence Japp had gone, she went out herself and loitered along the road by which he must return, and tried to feel as she had felt the evening before ; but, somehow, all was altered. The days succeed but do not resemble each other. Yesterday her fondest hopes had been unexpectedly realized, but to-day nothing was as it should have been, and her heart sank.

Then there was a step—a firm, leisurely step. She thought she would have recognized it among a thousand. At first she was for running away, but her strength failed her, and she stopped short.

“Ally,” he said, coming up to her, and lifting her little cold hand from her side.

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She looked up into his face, and again her own was transfigured. His impulse was to kiss her, but he refrained. He half regretted the simple indiscretion of the evening before ; but it was a habit of his to caress women when they looked nice ; he really could not help it.

" Dear little Ally !" he said, squeezing her hand. " May I call you so ? Ah, me ! Things might have been very different. But let us make the best of the life that is left us. I need say no more, I know. You understand my horror of the obvious ?"

Miss Spice thought that she understood.

" Wait," he proceeded ; " that is what I have to say to you."

So Miss Spice waited. She was the stepping-stone by which he had mounted into good society, and at first he was quite assiduous in his attentions to her—so much so, indeed, as to give her good reason to believe that it would be her own fault if she did not eventually become mistress of the Swiss Cottage. But he began of necessity to neglect Miss Spice as soon as his footing at Dane Court was thoroughly assured. He had so many irons in the fire by that time he could not attend to them all ; and he judged that Miss Spice was the one which was the least likely to become dangerously overheated.

Unfortunately, Miss Spice did not perceive that she was being neglected. He was always exceedingly gracious to her when they met, and would even toy with her a little in secluded spots in an absent way, as if from a sense of duty. Most women would have been galled by such caresses, but they were sufficient for Miss Spice. She never suspected that he could have caressed her without returning her passion, and she mistook his coldness for respect. She was entirely under the influence of tales of knights and dames of yore, and sought to model her own conduct and to account for his by what

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she knew of theirs under similar circumstances. She expected him to be in proper lover-like awe of her for the most part, and also to forget himself now and then, as on that first never-to-be-forgotten occasion ; and she knew that she should conduct herself with strictest maidenly reserve whatever happened. In that respect she felt that she had been remiss. She had made a mistake ; she had allowed him to hope too soon, and, as a natural result, he had shown no impatience. She must repair that error. She must simulate indifference until, unable to support the turmoil of his feelings any longer, and determined to know the worst even though it should be the death of him, he would fall on his knees before her, and, with outstretched hands, confess his burning passion, and implore her pity. Then, and not till then, she would shyly confess that she, too, loved. What would follow upon this momentous disclosure she did not quite know. Should she fall into his arms overcome with emotion, or should she run from the room with her long ringlets streaming behind her ? The said ringlets were neither so long nor so thick as Miss Spice supposed, but by putting her head well back she could just manage to make them touch the top of her waist-belt. She assured herself of this fact many times a day by shaking back her hair and feeling with her hand behind her. The gesture threatened to become habitual.

In those days Miss Spice was happy in her dreams, but she wanted one thing—a confidant. Half the pleasure of the position was lost to her for want of a sympathetic friend with whom to discuss it. She knew that caution was necessary ; betrayal might be fatal. Cunning is strength to the weak. Little Miss Spice looked about her. She thought of her good aunt, Mrs. Sophia Pepper, who spent most of her time in the kitchen ; and she yearned towards her, but hesitated, because that un-

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compromising old lady had not the cast of countenance which invites tender confidences.

"But surely, surely," said Miss Spice to herself, "it is most fitting that she should know. Is she not in the position of a mother to me?"

One day, accordingly, in a sudden paroxysm of hysterical sentiment, she flung her arms round the dear old lady's neck and sobbed aloud :

"Oh, aunt, I love him ! I love him !"

Her aunt was as much astonished at the outburst as Miss Spice could have wished. There was a dead silence for some seconds, broken only by peculiar noises in the old lady's throat. Miss Spice thought she was gasping with emotion.

"Say something to comfort me, dear aunt," she twittered.

"Comfort you?" the old lady retorted, tartly, in a choking voice. "I've a good mind to shake you. You nearly made me swallow my teeth."

And for an hour afterwards she grumbled and muttered, calling her niece anything but clever, and quite ignoring the ingenuous confession which had so nearly put an end to her existence.

Miss Spice never dared to renew the attempt.

The cottage at the Cross Roads had no attraction for Mr. Jellybond after he became intimate at Dane Court. He knew the intrinsic value of its contents ; but he loved luxury, warmth, and fatness, and hated spindle-shanks, both in women and furniture ; so that poor little Miss Spice, with her Sheraton and Chippendale, her self-denying habits and person pinched for want of proper food, rather repelled than allured him after Mrs. King-constance, in all the regal amplitude of her presence and her surroundings. Still, he meant to be kind to little Miss Spice—it was his way to be kind to women ; he prided himself upon that—and he called at the cottage

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pretty often. He paid one of his periodical visits soon after Miss Spice had so signally failed to find a confidant in her aunt. He permitted himself to call on Sunday, which nobody else was in the habit of doing thereabouts, and Miss Spice concluded that he came there in the hope of finding her alone. She received him with freezing politeness, and asked him to sit on the sofa. She then retired to the other end of the room. The conversation naturally flagged at that distance, and presently Mr. Jellybond gave it up altogether and relapsed into silence. He was thinking of other things, but Miss Spice thought he was affected by the cruelty of her conduct, and her mind misgave her. What if he had been bent on having an explanation when he came in, but had not the courage to face her while her attitude remained so severe? Miss Spice's little heart began to palpitate with sudden determination. Should she lose him altogether? No, a thousand times no! She would melt in time. She would deign to approach him.

"The weather seems to be gently breaking," Mr. Jellybond said, solemnly.

Miss Spice thought he had seen signs in her countenance of the approaching change in her demeanor, and was alluding to it figuratively. She rose from her distant seat, and, above maidenly reserve, shook back her tresses, fluttered across the room, and sank down on the sofa at his side.

Mr. Jellybond bounced up. They were opposite the window. Any one might pass and see them—some one had passed, in fact, for just at that moment Babs walked in without knocking.

Mr. Jellybond greeted her with effusion, then hastily took his leave.

Miss Spice raised her clasped hands to heaven when he had gone, and ejaculated:

"Oh-h-h!"

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Between Miss Spice and Babs there was a curious intimacy. It was intermittent in its expression. Miss Spice did not see Babs for months at a time ; then Babs would begin to come again very often, and always alone, and always, too, with something nice in a little basket for Miss Spice, when she found she could manage it—that is to say, when she could abstract things from luncheon and larder, or wheedle them out of the cook. She was the only one of Miss Spice's many visitors who ever thought of relieving her necessities. Babs loved to give ; it was one of the ways she had of making a good time for herself. She loved the kind people, too—the genuinely kind. They had an irresistible attraction for her, and she never failed to find them out by intuition. Having found them, she imposed upon them.

“ What's the matter, Ally ?” she said.

Miss Spice shut her eyes, and saw her knight on his knees before her. Another minute, and—

“ Ah !” she moaned. “ Ah, Babs, you little know what you've done !”

“ Eh ?” said Babs.

“ Is not *his* a noble presence ?” Miss Spice pursued.

“ Whose ? Old J's ? That's the kind of thing he'd say himself.”

“ *Do* I speak like him ?” Miss Spice implored to know.

“ No, not exactly. It's more as if you were trying to speak like him. I can't, either ; but Montacute does. You should hear him !”

“ Surely you do not mock that princely stranger ?” Miss Spice interposed, with severity.

“ Princely ! Oh, come now, Ally, we're talking of old J—”

Miss Spice started to her feet.

“ Hush !” she cried. “ No more, not another word, if you love me.”



“ ‘HE IMPRINTED A KISS ON MY LIPS’ ”

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"Ally," said Babs, "Alicia Spice—out with it! What's the matter?"

"Alas! I can only repeat," said Miss Spice, "little you know what you have done. How can you, how could any one know who had not witnessed what has just passed between us?"

She sank back on the sofa, clasped her hands, and gazed up at the ceiling.

"My heart is bursting! I must speak!" she gasped. "Will you promise never to betray me?"

"Oh, *I* won't tell," said Babs.

"My dear child," Miss Spice exclaimed, "why did I not think of you sooner? In spite of your youth, I now perceive that you are the only one I know who can really sympathize with me and help me at this critical period of my life. You must know, then, that I have given my heart to this stranger—I had almost said this *royal* stranger."

"And has he accepted it?" Babs asked.

"I should not have said, perhaps, that I had already given it to him. He has only to ask, however."

"Then he has not asked you yet?"

"That is where *I* am to blame," sighed Miss Spice. "Sit down, dear child. I have given him no encouragement, no reason to hope; and now I fear he has gone from me in despair."

"He did look rather queer," said Babs, sitting down on a Chippendale chair and nursing her basket. "But how do you know he loves you?"

"Once, on one occasion, he—he"—she dropped her voice and brought it out with an effort—"he imprinted a kiss on my lips."

"How nasty!" said Babs.

"My dear, you wound me," said Miss Spice.

"Sorry—'polergize," said Babs. "What are you going to do now?"

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"What *shall* I do? Is the injury irreparable? I ask myself. How can I bid him hope? Oh, if he could but see me now, at this supreme moment of contrition and remorse, if he could but hear my voice!"

"Why not serenade him?" said Babs.

"Ladies do not serenade their lovers," said Miss Spice.

"Yes, they do, sometimes; Miriam serenaded Donatello in *The Romance of Monte Beni*."

"Did she though, really?" said Miss Spice, brought down by sudden interest from her highfalutin to the tone that was natural to her. "How do you know?"

"Read about them."

"But, my dear child, you've often told me that you never read anything."

"I know," said Babs; "but haven't you noticed when you say very positively that you hate a thing and never do it you find yourself liking it and doing it half the time? That's how I am about reading."

Miss Spice blinked several times in a hard attempt to follow her, then shook her head.

"What were you going to tell me?" she asked.

"About Miriam and Donatello. He was sulky about something and she went to the foot of his tower and sang to him, charmingly. He was a fantastic creature, with fawn's ears, all furry, under his hair."

"Oh, but one could not do such a thing," said Miss Spice.

"Why not? I've done something of the same kind myself—a most romantic thing. I supped alone with Cadenhuse one night up in the tower."

"Babs, you are not telling the truth."

"No, of course I'm not," said Babs.

"But did you really?"

"Yes, I did."

"I don't know whether to believe you or not."

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"Believe me, or ask Cadenhouse. I have threatened to go again some day. At present he's on the lookout, I'm sure, so I'm waiting. The fun is to take him by surprise."

"But do you love Lord Cadenhouse?"

"I don't know," said Babs. "I feel all hot in the chest about him."

"You *do* love him!" Miss Spice exclaimed. "Oh, is it not wondrous?"

"Wondrous!" said Babs. "I wish I'd known it sooner."

"But, my dear child, you're very young to be in love!" Miss Spice exclaimed, shocked into her natural sense of propriety for the moment.

"I'm head and shoulders taller than you are," said Babs, "and a hundred years more precocious. I'm sure there's nothing like love, and I'm going to be in love now all the time. It's rather a spoil-sport, though, I fancy," she added, thoughtfully. "I hesitate to haul him out now. At first—"

She broke off because Miss Spice's attention had wandered, and asked her what she was thinking about.

"The words, you know," said Miss Spice, vaguely.

"Words for a serenade?" said Babs. "The words don't matter. Miriam sang in German, which Donatello did not understand; but her song was none the less efficacious for that. The magic is in the voice, you know."

"But perhaps this Miriam had more reason—felt justified—Donatello had doubtless confessed his love," Miss Spice stammered.

"His attentions had been most marked," said Babs, "and also he had allowed Miriam to make love to him."

"Dear me!" said Miss Spice. "Then it was not considered improper?"

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"Dear, no!" said Babs. "They were idealists, you must remember."

"But I don't quite know what idealists are," said Miss Spice.

"Nor I either, exactly," Babs answered, candidly. "But idealists have the privilege of doing pretty much as they like."

"Might one be an idealist without knowing it?" Miss Spice wondered.

"I should think nobody knows they're idealist till they find themselves doing as idealists do."

"But what do they do?"

"They begin by worshipping the ideal; then— But if you ever see a lady and gentleman in a public place, capering along hand in hand, followed by a crowd of ragamuffins, to the music of a crystal flute or Pan-pipes made of reeds, you may be sure they are idealists. It is in such outbursts of innocent mirth that idealists betray themselves, so I gather from the book. I'll lend it to you, then you'll see for yourself I'm telling you the truth. All idealists are great at something—great painters, poets, sculptors, singers, greatly in love; and for the most part great geese; but glorified geese, of course. Let's have tea. Do see what good things I've brought you!"

She opened her little basket, and Miss Spice peeped in involuntarily.

"Babs," she said, "you always do me good. I couldn't have touched a thing when you came in, but now—"

Babs jumped up, and sang:

"Polly put the kettle on,
We'll all have tea."

"But poor dear aunt is out," said Miss Spice.

"We'll keep some for her," said Babs. "Come into

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the kitchen. I do envy you the run of the kitchen ! I'm howled at by everybody if I even peep into ours."

"It is not at all the same thing," said Miss Spice, with propriety. "Of course you cannot be allowed to mix with the servants."

"Blow !" said Babs—"the fire, I mean."

Miss Spice got the bellows, and sat down on a creepy-stool in front of the kitchen fire.

"I do so enjoy talking to you, Babs," she said. "You have always something unusual to say. You are never obvious."

"Ally, there you are again, thinking of *him*," said Babs, and added, mocking the great man : "It is a long lane that—er—keeps on turning."

"Dear man !" sighed Miss Spice.

When Babs had gone, Miss Spice sat herself down once more on the little creepy-stool in front of the kitchen fire and recalled their conversation. That impossible serenade, how it haunted her ! She warbled a little. Of course such a thing could never be done, but suppose—Her gentle bosom heaved ; just to suppose it took away her breath. But suppose she should be wandering with her guitar in that direction ! Miss Spice had inherited a guitar from her mother, but she could not play it. Still, suppose— And so she continued, not realizing how easy it is to pass from the vague dream to the positive purpose.

CHAPTER XIV

BABS jumped out of bed at daylight next morning, seized pencil and paper, and wrote ; and as she wrote she laughed immoderately. She was not so ready with her pen as with her tongue, and the composition she was engaged upon cost her much time and trouble ; but the compensating pleasure was extreme. Every now and then she chanted a line to try it ; and when she had finished she went through the whole thing, and hugged herself in an ecstasy of merriment.

"I wonder if she will !" she exclaimed. "But if she does, may I be there to see !"

Having finished, she wrote a note which ran :

"DEAR ALLY,—I send herewith Hawthorne's book, *Transformation*, in three volumes—the one I told you about yesterday. He changed the name ; it used to be called *The Romance of Monte Beni*. May it be useful. I also send you a little serenade I have just composed. Learn it ; it will go to almost any tune. Do—do decide to try it ; and tell me when you mean to make the attempt. Faint heart never won—er—fine gentleman.

"Yours truly,

"BABS."

Having made the books into a neat parcel, with the note inside, Babs threw open the window and looked out. Below, in the garden, a slouching young fellow

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was digging and delving. Clodd Dulditch was a callow youth, commonly considered not very bright, who had been added to the out-door establishment at Dane Court by Mrs. Kingconstance, at her sister-in-law's instigation, principally because his mother was a widow. There being nothing in particular for him to do, he was at everybody's beck and call. Sometimes he was made to work in the gardens, sometimes in the stables, or the fields, or the plantations; but no matter what the task, he conscientiously shirked it to the best of his ability. Clodd was at that time a barbarian possessed of some of the qualities appertaining to civilization—a big-mouthed, small-nosed, narrow-eyed, red-headed son of the soil, who did not seem to have wit enough to be a thorough rogue or resolution enough to be an honest man.

"Clodd!" Babs called to him. "Here, Clodd, I'm letting a parcel down with a string! Come and take it! And run with it as fast as you can to Miss Spice, and bring me back an answer."

"She won't be up," said Clodd, deliberately, approaching the parcel.

"'She's' the cat," Babs retorted. "Speak more respectfully, Mr. Clodd Dulditch, if you please. It's no business of yours whether Miss Spice is up or not. Do as you are told—and reap the reward of merit."

Clodd's eyes brightened intelligently, and he went, but without any show of alacrity.

Babs remained at the window. It was early summer. The balmy morning breezes blew in upon her. The roses were beginning to bloom, the great horse-chestnuts were in full flower, pink and white hawthorns were shedding petals and perfume on every side, and an old apple-tree just beneath the window was bursting into blossom. The country, stretching away on either hand, as seen through gaps in the trees, ended on the far horizon in gentle hills, made dim by distance, while between, on

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every side, the land could be seen parcelled out into green fields, pasture and arable. Thick hedge-rows, fine old trees, and here and there a dip in the ground or sparkling watercourse relieved the prospect from monotony; while directly opposite, where the hills beyond the valley held up their heads to heaven, there was always for Babs the mystery and the interest of the tower.

She gazed at it now, and as she gazed she suffered a change of mood. Her spirits went down, a great feeling of dissatisfaction seized upon her. She did not think the serenade so very funny after all; she wished she had not sent it. At that time Babs was always either doing something or wishing she had not done it.

Clodd Dulditch appeared in the course of the morning with an answer from Miss Spice, which he was cunning enough to keep until he could deliver it to Babs when there was nobody by to see. Babs did not want to be questioned about the note, but, all the same, she resented Mr. Clodd Dulditch's assumption of secrecy. It lowered her in her own estimation to have the gardener's boy suspect her of surreptitious dealings, and made her still more dissatisfied with her morning's work.

Miss Spice wrote :

" Thank you so much for the book, dear. I shall read it with the very *deepest* interest. The serenade is *lovely*, and so appropriate. But of course I could not *dream* of doing such a thing."

Babs tore off the half-sheet impulsively, and replied, in pencil :

" Don't. I'll think of something else. Miriam was a ridiculous foreigner, and not a person to be imitated at all.

LORRAINE KINGCONSTANCE."

She gave this note to the respectable Clodd Dulditch,

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with orders to deliver it immediately, and a shilling for his trouble.

She had made the note up into a cocked hat. Clodd opened it, read it, and not seeing enough in it to make it worth while to deliver it, burned it with other rubbish when he emptied his week-day pockets on Saturday night.

Transformation was a revelation to Miss Spice. She read it, she was absorbed into it, she lived the life. She took her daily walks abroad in Rome in an atmosphere of high romance. She was Hilda in her tower, she was Miriam—more especially was she Miriam—and the sere-nade she was not going to sing was always in her mind.

Her good aunt, Mrs. Sophia Pepper, did not know what to make of Miss Spice in these days. She caught her continually in some extraordinary pose or other. Once, after Miss Spice had been alone in the drawing-room for some hours, the old lady, going in with a lamp, surprised her just as she jumped up from the couch, her arms raised above her head, and was beginning to dance.

"Gracious, Alicia!" said Mrs. Sophia Pepper. "You did give me a turn. I nearly dropped the lamp. But you'd need to caper and stretch yourself or your limbs will be shrivelling with the amount you sit about."

"I'll get the tea, aunt," Miss Spice said, meekly. "I'm afraid I'm absent sometimes. You must forgive me."

"Oh, you mean well enough, Alicia," the old lady answered. "But I wish you'd think less and do more. I'd be obliged to you if you'd get the tea, for I'm about done with seeing after everything most of the day while you're sitting in the drawing-room. It usen't to be so once, but something's come to you of late—I don't know what, only you're not the same at all."

Miss Spice raised her little hands in protest, and went out of the room all atwitter, anxious to atone. She began to cut bread for toast. If only he could see her so

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employed—Charlotte and Werther. Ah, *The Sorrows of Werther* ! But *he* should not sorrow long. Comfort must be conveyed to him. Miriam sang.

Kneeling before the kitchen fire making the toast, Miss Spice began to imitate Miriam—softly at first, then, suddenly and involuntarily as it seemed to her, she burst into full song—a glorious burst of clear, full-throated song. Up and down the scale she went, *bravura*, with ever-increasing spirit—never mind the words. Still on her knees she flourished the toasting-fork, she threw herself into expressive attitudes like an opera-singer. The toast went flying across the kitchen. She never missed it.

When at last she was forced to stop, out of breath, she became conscious of Mrs. Sophia Pepper standing in the doorway, eying her grimly.

“ Well, of all—” the old lady began. “ What in the name of idiocy are you making such a noise for yowling the house down and anticking ? I declare I think you’re training for a lunatic asylum.”

“ Oh, auntie, I was only trying my voice,” Miss Spice remonstrated.

“ Trying your voice ! I never saw such an exhibition in all my life. And what about the tea ?” said Mrs. Sophia Pepper.

During the meal Miss Spice was conscious that her aunt was looking at her over her spectacles from time to time inquiringly.

“ I’d like to know what tick it is you’ve got into your head, Alicia,” she said, at last ; “ but if you’ve any music in you, I’m not the person to quench it. Sing while you can, by all means—the singing season of life is short ; but sing like a lady, and not like a play-acting, painty-faced, bold-eyed hussy.”

“ But, aunt, that’s the way to sing. Every one I heard sang like that when I was in London.”

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"Well, if you sing like that here, then the Lord have mercy upon your soul!" said Mrs. Sophia Pepper.

"*Here!*" said Miss Spice, bitterly. "Here nobody ever has a chance—no woman, at least. We're born, we mourn, we die, we rot; that's the history of women in Danehurst. We never have a chance."

Mrs. Sophia Pepper shook her head and compressed her lips.

"You should have married," she said.

"Who, if you please?" said Miss Spice. Then she looked up through the window at the strip of sky above the trees. The very real privations of her life, so heroically borne, had made their mark upon her poor little anxious face, once so rosy and plump and pretty, but now so pinched. Miss Spice was a sweet-natured, practical little person naturally, born to be a self-effacing wife, a devoted mother, a happy home-maker; so it had been intended by nature, but man, the marplot, had intervened with his social muddle and spoiled the design, so that Miss Spice was wasted. Her happy home-making proclivities had found no outlet, vain delusions had taken the place of interests and occupations, and all her promise was being resolved into fantastic performance.

When she went to her room she sat long at her window looking out. It was a moonlight night, and she had put out the candle for economy.

"I wish I knew what to do," she was saying to herself. "If I do nothing I shall decay, like the rest; if I do something I may have my moment"

She jumped up, all energy for an instant, then she sat down again, a prey to doubt.

"Oh, for a sign!" she cried aloud, "a sign, a sign—just 'Yes' or 'No'! If a cloud crosses the moon in the next ten minutes, that shall be 'No.'"

She sat with her little watch in her hand, anxiously waiting; and it was as if nature were anxious to respond

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to her appeal, for in less than ten minutes a great white cloud came hurrying up and crossed the moon. The sign was significant enough, but Miss Spice was not satisfied.

"I might have made it 'Yes' as easily as 'No,' " she said. "If a bird chirps in the next ten minutes, that shall be 'Yes.' "

For ten long minutes she looked at her little watch ; eleven, twelve, fifteen—there was not a sound. Miss Spice got up and walked about the room, dissatisfied still.

An old newspaper was lying on a chair. She took it up mechanically. The margin showed white in the moonlight ; she tore a strip of it off, but with no very clear intent. Two signs already were against her. Should she hazard a third ? Why not ? She searched for a piece of pencil, tore the scrap of paper in two, wrote on one piece "Yes," on the other "No," dropped both pieces on the floor, shut her eyes, turned round twice, then went down on her knees, and groped about, without looking, until she found one of the scraps. It was all done in the most strictly honorable manner ; there could be no mistake about it this time. Miss Spice lighted the candle and looked.

The word was "No."

CHAPTER XV

THE Swiss Cottage stood in a pine-wood half-way up a steep hill just outside the village of Danehurst. It owed its name in part to its position, but also to sundry gables, balconies, and other ornamental projections of wood, stained brown, which made it very much resemble the little models of Swiss *chalets*. As was usual in that neighborhood, the cottage had been placed so as to be as much concealed from view as possible; the chimneys only were visible from the road below, and no one would have suspected that a house of any importance stood there, yet the so-called "cottage" was of considerable size. Immediately round about it the wood had been cleared to make room for the gardens. The grounds were entered from the high-road by handsome iron gates. There was no lodge. The drive, cut through the fir-wood and sheltered on either side by the trees, wound round the hill up to the house picturesquely. There the thrushes and blackbirds sang and the rooks came cawing. It pleased Mr. Jellybond to watch them. Their black forms silhouetted against the blue were extremely decorative, he said. When he had admired their beauty to his heart's content he shot them.

That afternoon, while poor little Miss Spice was wearying for him and forming extravagant plans to console him, the dear man had been strolling about his grounds enjoying the freshness and the balsamic odor of the firs in the company of Mrs. Normanton and one of her daughters, whom he had waylaid at his own gate just as they

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were driving past, and persuaded to enter and stay for tea.

"What a strange coincidence," he said, "that I should have been at the gate just as you were passing! And how fortunate for me!"

"And for us too, I'm sure," Mrs. Normanton replied, smiling.

She was looking young and animated, and there was a gleam in her eyes as if she were illuminated inside, and the light flashed forth.

Mr. Jellybond repeated, "What a strange coincidence!" times enough to make one wonder at last how the coincidence had occurred. Fortunately, there was no one there to wonder, as little Meg Normanton, whose unsophisticated eyes saw nothing that was not obvious, did not count.

"It is so nice to see you here!" Mr. Jellybond took occasion to remark in an expressive aside to Mrs. Normanton; and this also he repeated several times, and each time Mrs. Normanton smiled and sighed. Satisfaction was mingled with regret in those smiles and sighs. It is wonderful how young and romantic people can go on feeling, even after they have lost their figures. Mrs. Normanton knew that poor Mr. Jellybond had discovered too late that she was the one who alone could have made his life perfect, if only—and the knowledge was sadly sweet. However, there was no help for it now. Squire Normanton was a fact—an unregretted fact as far as Mrs. Normanton was concerned; but that did not prevent certain sentimental pleasantnesses—a little speech, a lingering handclasp, a look direct—all quite innocent, of course, and indefinite; yet what a difference they made! Life had been so insipid before Mr. Jellybond came; now it had its *sauce piquante*. Mr. Jellybond loved to be *sauce piquante* to a lady's life—to any number of them. Half the ladies in the neighbor-

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hood brightened at the sound of his name. Each, like Mrs. Normanton, had a little secret of her own (something different in each case) respecting Mr. Jellybond, and kept it ; and he, honest man, was discretion itself. He seldom even mentioned one lady to another, and never except in a casual way ; but they all talked about him. They said he was so original, so clever and inventive, so unlike anybody else, and such an acquisition to the neighborhood !

Mrs. Normanton was charmed with the grounds. She was taken by surprise again and again by some ingenious contrivance or other. Once she stood by accident on an innocent-looking flat stone, and twenty feet away, out of a marble basin, a beautiful fountain spurted up into the air. At another point they sat on a seat from which could be obtained a lovely view of the valley, and presently Mrs. Normanton perceived that the scene was slowly changing. At first she was startled, thinking it was an optical illusion ; but no, the landscape was really moving on like pictures in a panorama. Mr. Jellybond enjoyed the mystification of the ladies for a little before he explained that the seat was adjusted so that when you sat upon it it revolved slowly on an axis in order to show you the prospect from every point of view.

Another seat stood just inside the entrance to a grotto. Mr. Jellybond seemed to wish that they should sit there, and the ladies complied, although they would not have chosen that seat themselves, because the sun shining full upon it dazzled their eyes. No sooner were they seated, however, than there descended in front of them a sheet of water, and they found themselves sheltered from the heat and shut up in delicious seclusion.

When they came to the house Mr. Jellybond stepped aside, and with a courtly bow waved them towards the door, which was shut, but opened of itself on the instant.

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As they crossed the threshold they were welcomed with a burst of instrumental music.

"Dear me! This is fairyland," said Mrs. Normanton.

"While you are here, yes," said Mr. Jellybond.

The hall was hung with red cloth from floor to ceiling, which made a telling background for the white statues (draped, of course) which adorned it, and for the tree-ferns, palms, and other foliage plants which were grouped about in profusion with excellent effect. They were not all real, but the artificial ones were so natural and so cleverly disposed no one ever suspected them—not even Mr. Jellybond's intelligent housekeeper, Mrs. Dulditch, who watered them all impartially. Mr. Jellybond's big bland countenance expanded every time he caught her performing this duty.

He led his guests into the dining-room, a charming apartment panelled in oak, where the tea was spread out at one end of the long table.

"Will you preside, dear lady?" he said. "I had it placed here that I might know for once what it is to have the chair at the head of my table filled to my entire satisfaction."

It was a handsome oak chair of ecclesiastical design, with arms, and a high carved back—a large chair, but Mrs. Normanton might well be said to fill it satisfactorily. When she had taken her seat she looked about her, expecting the unexpected to happen; but for several minutes all was ordinary. Then, suddenly, high up near the ceiling at the far end of the room opposite to her, something went "click," and there flashed forth from the carved cornice in prismatic colors the one word "Welcome."

Mr. Jellybond was gratified by a prolonged "Oh-h-h!" from both ladies.

"I cannot—I never *shall* understand," Mrs. Normanton burst forth, "how it is that you, with your talents—

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your *genius*, I may say—can stay buried alive in such a place as this.”

“Why, dear lady, it is a charming place,” said Mr. Jellybond. “What more could the heart of man desire? If I went forth into the world again, the unattainable would still be the unattainable.”

He looked significantly into the lady’s face. She cast down her eyes. Then they both sighed. It was very pleasant.

“I pride myself on the number of my peaceful pursuits,” said Mr. Jellybond, “upon my ample leisure, upon my inward calm, upon my outward cheerfulness. Mine has been a varied existence—not such a very long one, perhaps, as time goes; but varied, amply varied. I have seen much—too much, it may be; and now my heart’s desire is peace; and it seems to me that I have attained to peace at last. What do you say, dear lady? It is a long lane that—er—keeps on turning.”

When the ladies had gone Mr. Jellybond yawned unaffectedly. Then he dressed for dinner. It was known in the village that he always dressed for dinner, and the fact added much to his personal prestige.

There was a library at the Swiss Cottage. Mr. Jellybond, when he settled in that neighborhood, had a serious purpose in his mind. The library was a good room down-stairs. It was lined from floor to ceiling with learned books, handsomely bound. The books on the upper shelves were dummies, but that did not spoil the effect. Books were always lying about, some open on tables, or piled up on chairs, or even on the floor, as if in constant use; while charts, maps, scientific instruments, and sheets of closely written manuscript completed the learned lumber. The room looked like an intellectual workshop, and visitors, who were always shown in there unless they were special intimates, were duly impressed. But Mr. Jellybond protested against

being considered learned. He wished it to be understood that his evenings were spent at the piano and his mornings in painting pictures—so he said; but somehow his protests only confirmed the belief in his more solid acquirements.

It was not to his library, where Miss Spice always fondly imagined him immersed in thought, but to another room, one of the best in the house, which he used as a withdrawing-room, that Mr. Jellybond retired that evening after dinner to pursue his studies. This room was up-stairs, and gave onto a balcony overhanging the valley, of which it commanded a magnificent view. It was by no means a conventional apartment; belonging to such an original person, that was not to be expected. Mr. Jellybond would not have it called a drawing-room; he intended it to be a chamber of the arts, he said. The shape, to begin with, was unusual. There was a fair space in the centre, but all about it nooks and corners, the result of throwing three rooms into one, and such like structural alterations. The doors were mahogany—not real mahogany, but so well painted that no one could have told the difference. The floor was parquet, a new kind made on canvas and sold by the yard, but exceedingly effective. A few silk Persian rugs were artfully disposed about it; but everything in the room was artfully disposed, even the grand piano, that usually hopeless piece of furniture from the point of view of beauty, looked well. Music was also represented by a harp and lyre. Mr. Jellybond played the piano, but he confessed, with his accustomed frankness, that the harp and lyre he could only love for their form. Pictures of lovely women in voluptuous attitudes were cunningly placed between ravishing landscapes and seascapes on the walls, and statues gleamed against silk curtains. There were flowers and foliage plants, but not too many of them. The prevailing tint was achieved by a clever

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combination of shades of green, blue, and pink, with daring splashes of purple and red. Slow combustion grates and Adams's mantel-pieces decorated the fire-places, of which there were several.

Mr. Jellybond was in the habit of doing a good deal for himself in the house. He had acquired the habit in his travelling days, he said, and kept it up because otherwise he should not have had active exercise enough to keep him in health and spirits, but also because it bored him to be much waited upon.

When he came up-stairs that evening after dinner he changed his spruce dress coat for a velvet smoking-jacket, put a match to the wood fire which was laid ready for lighting in a cosey corner, drew a luxurious sofa towards it, put a reading-lamp on a small table beside the sofa, and lighted another lamp which hung from the ceiling and cast a delightful, rich, warm, rose-colored glow over the whole apartment. The French window which opened onto the balcony he also threw wide to keep the room fresh. He had heard that warmth and fresh air tend greatly to prolong life. He then drew the curtains and shut out the last cold gray of the twilight, which did not harmonize with his feelings so well as the rose-colored lamp, and at last, with a sigh of satisfaction, he stretched himself on the couch, lighted a cigar, and opened a book. Before he began to read he glanced round and seemed well pleased. Ease of body and mind, with affluence and beautiful possessions, were his ; he owed neither money nor grudge to any one ; he had a great object in life and many small ones—the small ones were the ladies who liked him. He was no hermit, and did not profess to be. His capacity for enjoyment was enormous ; he had carefully cultivated it, and was preserving it as carefully, in order that it might be prolonged to the utmost limit of life. Moderation—that was one of his words. To keep himself well in hand and never let

himself be satiated was the principle he proposed to act upon for the remainder of his days. At one time he had worked too hard, but he had recovered from that, and now he was determined not to go to the opposite extreme. So far he had succeeded well in life, and he expected to succeed to the end—if only no outside influence came to balk him. Himself he could control, but there were others besides himself to be reckoned with. However, there is no playing any game without an opponent; the thing is to be prepared for your opponents. He kept himself prepared by speaking the truth as nearly as possible.

Mr. Jellybond was reading *Puck* that evening for the first time. He had just come to the description, writ in burning words, of the painting of Cleopatra. He read it twice, he gloated over it, then closed the book, shut his eyes, and leaned back on the couch to recall every graphic detail scattered through the story and converging at this point, where, by their aid, that splendid creature, with "one gorgeous blossom of the pomegranate" pressed to her "scarlet lips," was conjured up in the flesh for his delectation. He objected to the class to which she belonged—too venal, he said, and too easy of attainment. You lost all the pleasure of the pursuit with them. Now, Mrs. Kingconstance—He meditated for a good half-hour on her beauty, then returned to his book; but before he could resume the story some one knocked at the door.

"Come in," Mr. Jellybond exclaimed, not over-amiably. Like other studious men, he objected to be interrupted in the ardent pursuit of knowledge, especially when he was, as at that moment, very much "in the vein."

The knock was repeated, from which it was evident that the person without had not heard the invitation to enter.

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"Come in, my good woman," Mr. Jellybond said again, more blandly this time, but without raising his voice. His housekeeper, Mrs. Dulditch, Clodd's mother, was deaf ; and it was his playful habit to keep her waiting in this way when she disturbed him at inconvenient moments. Mr. Jellybond's household consisted of most respectable elderly people. There was a boy, who never appeared, to do the rough work in the kitchen, because Mr. Jellybond did not approve of young maids in a bachelor's establishment.

After a pause Mrs. Dulditch knocked again several times.

Mr. Jellybond did not reply. He threw himself back on his sofa and watched the door with an amused expression until the handle was turned, then he shut his eyes.

Mrs. Dulditch looked at him a moment, and also looked at his half-smoked cigar, which was well alight in the ash-tray at his elbow. Mrs. Dulditch might not hear much, but could see more than most people.

"Please, sir—" she began, in some trepidation.

Mr. Jellybond looked at her in apparent astonishment.

"Did you *knock*?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, several times. Perhaps you were asleep, sir."

Mr. Jellybond gave her a stony stare, which made her fidget uncomfortably.

"Do you want anything?" he asked, enunciating each word with slow distinctness, just loud enough for her to hear.

"No, sir, *I* don't, sir, thank you, sir," she replied ; "but there's a person down-stairs as does."

"Who *is* the person?" Mr. Jellybond demanded. "If it be some one asking alms, give him alms"—and he waived his hand as who should say, "You know the lordly custom of the house—give him alms by all means ; but do not disturb *me*." "Really, Mrs. Dulditch, you

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should know better—at this hour, when I am always occupied.”

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said the housekeeper, becoming abject through sheer nervousness. “It isn’t my fault, sir. She insisted on seeing you. She said she’d take a stick to me if I didn’t let her in. She isn’t askin’ arms. She laughed scornful when I offered her a shillin’.” Mrs. Dulditch looked round, then came a step nearer, and added, mysteriously: “It’s *that* person, sir.”

“Indeed!” said Mr. Jellybond, with the slightest possible change of tone, as he put his feet to the ground and stood up in a slow and dignified manner. “Now Mrs. Dulditch,” he continued, confidentially, “what would you do under the circumstances? That the woman is mad I think does not admit of a doubt. Also, that she has no claim upon me—except the natural claim of one so afflicted”—he solemnly shook his head—“no impartial judge would deny. But still, what am I to do? If I refuse to see her—”

“She’ll make a row in the village, sir, and come again, that’s all.”

“Ah!” replied Mr. Jellybond. “I was too good-natured in the first instance. If I had steeled my heart against her entreaties I should have saved myself much trouble. Remember that, Mrs. Dulditch—I should have saved myself much trouble. It is not an advantage to be born with a soft heart. Mine has always been too tender. I forget my duty to myself only too often. But now, I suppose, Mrs. Dulditch, there is nothing for it but to see her. You had better show her up, my good woman—you had better show her up.”

Mr. Jellybond looked at his housekeeper, smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and sighed audibly enough to impress her.

“I’ll show her up, sir,” said Mrs. Dulditch.

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. DULDITCH ushered in a handsome, gipsy-like creature, much bedizened with bright ribbons and solid gold jewelry of antique design.

At the first glance she looked old, but her slim figure, dark face, and high color, her thick black hair and extreme activity, together with a habit she had of gesticulating so that she seemed to be talking with her whole body, made it hard to determine what her age might be. She entered the room as if she had a right to be there, coolly seated herself in an easy-chair without waiting to be asked, glanced round, and then looked Mr. Jellybond full in the face.

"Well, Tinney," she tartly observed, "it's some time now since I last had the pleasure of seeing you."

"It is hard that we cannot oftener meet," he replied. "If there be anything that could add to my happiness at this time it would be the delight of seeing you, dressed as becomes you, sitting here night after night, the ornament of my lonely hearth and the comfort of my monotonous ease."

"Fudge!" she ejaculated. "Don't talk to me like that. You do it very well, I allow, and doubtless it's the c'rect thing in some places; but to her as remembers the very day you first put on that style it won't go down, I do assure you."

"Practice makes perfect," he blandly observed. "Practice is my plough. I have put my hand to it, and I do not turn back."

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"Tinney, you're a fool," the woman said.

He glanced round the room complacently by way of answer. Her eyes followed his, and she reversed her judgment.

"No," she reflected aloud, "you're not a fool; but you might easily pass for one."

"I only take on the color of my surroundings," he replied. "It is the way with the cleverest insects. Socially our safety depends upon our appearing to be like other people—and our popularity on appearing to be different. But I fear that is not obvious enough for you."

"It's mighty clever, I suppose," she said, melting into a smile. It was evident from the way she looked at him that her admiration for him was great, and that she found it hard to keep up the appearance of wrath with which she had begun the conversation.

"You must have some wine," said Mr. Jellybond, following up his advantage.

He took a bunch of keys from his pocket.

"Kindly excuse me a moment," he said, as he left the room.

The woman looked half pleased and half amused at this formality.

Mr. Jellybond returned with a tray, on which were glasses, biscuits, and a decanter. He put it on a small table beside her, poured out two glasses of wine, took one himself, and left her in command of the decanter.

"Well, here's to you, Tinney," she said, lifting the glass to her lips—"here's luck."

"Here's luck," he responded.

"And how are you gettin' on?" she asked, in a convivial tone.

"It is well with me," he replied.

"Take care," she said. "It mayn't be so well with you as you flatter yourself. I'll have some more of that

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wine"—she helped herself. "It's better nor you send me."

Mr. Jellybond laughed inaudibly.

"Well, really now, it is the very same," he said. "I protest it is."

"The glass, then, is of a better quality, and gives it a finer flavor," she rejoined, with a sneer. "But take care—take care. Your luck's in my hands. Just how you treat me, so shall you prosper. Haven't I told you time after time?" she cried, growing vehement. "Haven't I warned you? And haven't I never warned you a day too soon? It's not me's the one to call wolf when there isn't none."

Mr. Jellybond's countenance lowered as he listened.

"Is there anything wrong?" he asked, in an altered voice.

"Oh, you're givin' me your best attention at last, are you?" she exclaimed. "You're not the boy to give nothin' for nothin', I know. And there wasn't no fear of your givin' two fourpenny bits for a sixpence, neither, since you were the height of three pen'orth o' coppers." She finished her second glass of wine. "But you want me to look after your interests, sharp and all as you are; you can't get on without me. And I do look after your interests—doesn't matter how you treat me. Where would you be now but for me, dunderhead? It's me's thought of everything for you all along. You can do as you're told, and that's all. And it's well for you that I do look after you—so I tell you again. Three times this week have I laid the cards in the moonlight for you; and three times this week have they fallen the same."

"What did they say?" he asked, in evident anxiety.

"They said 'Danger, discovery, defeat, and disgrace.' Now, am I crying wolf?"

"You are not mistaken, of course?" he said.

"Mistaken!" she retorted, contemptuously.

"But what danger is threatening? We can avoid it if we know," he put in, eagerly.

"I can't get at that without you," she declared.

"Have you brought the cards?" he asked.

"Now *do* I—just tell me—*do* I look like a fool?"

"You are discretion itself," he replied. "Of course it would never do to bring them here."

"No, I should think not," she retorted; then added, mincingly, "and so I have come to ask you to join a party of pleasure to-morrow evening at my residence, Thorne Lodge, Danehurst."

"I will not fail you," he replied.

The woman rose, poured herself out a third glass of wine, drank it off, and prepared to depart.

Mr. Jellybond showed her to the door down-stairs as punctiliously as if she had been a duchess.

When he returned he poured himself out another glass of wine, and then began to pace about the room restlessly. After some reflection he rang for Mrs. Dulditch. Manlike, he could not leave well alone. He must try to improve the situation even at the risk of accentuating it.

"If that person comes again," he said to Mrs. Dulditch, "you must say, 'Not at home.' 'Not at home' does not mean that I am out, Mrs. Dulditch; it means that I am not accessible. If I could do anything for that poor creature I certainly would. But I really think that the doctor—or rather the clergyman—is better fitted to minister to her spiritual needs than I. It is the mind, Mrs. Dulditch—the mind."

"Well, then, I'll engage, sir," said Mrs. Dulditch, "that you'll talk with the best of them."

Mr. Jellybond smiled, as not ill-pleased at the compliment.

"I like to do what I can," he said, sighing—"what I can, you know. It is only right that we should

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all do what we can. Do you not think so, Mrs. Dulditch?"

"Yes, indeed, sir," Mrs. Dulditch agreed, fervently, with the feeling that her mind was being improved.

"She has asked me, poor thing, to go and see her to-morrow," Mr. Jellybond continued, "and I feel I must go. She would like me to read to her. It is a strange fancy, when there is Mr. Worringham, for instance, so much better fitted for the task. By-the-by, I must do what I can to interest him in this poor creature. Her great trouble, Mrs. Dulditch, is unbelief. She wants to believe, and she cannot believe. Now that, when you come to think of it, is very sad—in fact, Mrs. Dulditch, I may say it is awful. She is a fellow-creature, you know, and, although I fear to take too much upon myself, it seems to me that I should go and see her. I ought not to consider myself at all in the matter, perhaps."

"It would be kind to go, sir," said Mrs. Dulditch.

"Well, I do not know," Mr. Jellybond observed, deprecatingly; then added *sotto voce*, but still loud enough for her to hear, "perhaps Mr. Worringham will accompany me. *He* could not fail to help and comfort her."

When Mrs. Dulditch left him Mr. Jellybond caught sight of his handsome person in a strip of mirror that reached from floor to ceiling. He went up to it, gazed at himself a moment, then stepped back, and, with an immovable countenance, solemnly danced a fling. He danced it extremely well, too, and so lightly that no one in the next room could have heard him. The big man's confidence seemed to be restored by his agile gyrations. Mr. Worringham would have prayed had his mind been disturbed; Mr. Jellybond danced; and the result was the same—a circumstance worth noticing as an instance of the difficulty of laying down laws for the guidance of distressed human beings.

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Mr. Jellybond returned to his entrancing book, and remained absorbed in its contents until midnight ; then suddenly sleep came upon him, the book slipped from his hand, and he fell into a gentle, dreamless doze. It did not last long enough, however, for him to know that he had been asleep. He fancied he had been conscious of the noises about him—of the fire crackling in the grate, of the rustling of leaves, and, above all, of the melodious notes of the nightingale trilling the story of his whereabouts, of his love and longing, and calling persistently to the tardy mate who might pass him in the darkness if she did not hear his song. There is something enthralling in bird notes at night, and Mr. Jellybond's voluptuous nature, which had already been stirred to its depths by " Ouida " and wine, experienced a rapturous thrill when he gradually awoke to the charm of the hour. But man is not made to live alone, and Mr. Jellybond's perfect content was somewhat marred by a sleepy longing for Cleopatra.

The nightingale came closer to the window. The full, pure notes of its mellow call filled the room. Mr. Jellybond lay with closed eyes. The bird's song mingled with his pleasant thoughts. But suddenly certain words passed through his mind with chilling effect like a dark shadow on a sunlit sea : " Danger, discovery, defeat, and disgrace," and just at that moment his ears were filled with a strange, alarming cry. He raised himself on his elbow to listen. He was superstitious, and for a moment he believed that the sound was not of this world. His heart beat loudly ; his limbs were paralyzed. He was obliged, whether he would or not, to be still and listen. In a few seconds, however, alarm changed to wonder.

The first utterance had been a disconsolate shriek like the wail of a banshee, but it was quickly followed in quite a different key by a succession of other utterances



“ ‘CONFOUND THOSE CATS!’ HE SAID ”

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which had the effect of somewhat reassuring the listener. The sounds arose from the garden below, and he was soon convinced that they were caused by a human being ; but whether the person were in dire distress of body or were simply a lunatic at large he could not at first determine. He began to distinguish some attempt at a song, however, which caused him to lean to the lunatic theory. The voice ascended and descended a wonderful scale unknown to modern musicians. It paused to prolong a note here, then dropped to quaver on another there, then remounted backward, so to speak, and awkwardly, as if it could not see where it was going, till it was arrested by tumbling up against an obstacle which was too high for it to surmount, when it cracked and fell flat once more, down in the depths, whence, without pause, it reascended courageously time after time. Mr. Jellybond sat listening in mingled horror and astonishment. A maniac, he reflected, was a dangerous creature, with the strength of ten men. What should he do ? But here, happily, he remembered that his room was upstairs. No creature without wings or the agility of a monkey could scale the balcony. This was reassuring, and, once he felt safe, he began to be curious. He remembered that the window was open, and, after hurriedly turning out the lamps, he stole on tiptoe towards it. Cautiously he drew back the curtains, and peering out into the moonlight that lay before the heavily shadowed veranda, he tried to catch a glimpse of the disturber of his peace, but she (the creature was of the treble sex) was standing too close to the house to be visible from his window.

The night is bright ;
The white moonlight
Falls soft on flower and tree.
Oh, love, my dear,
Arise, appear !
I fain would comfort thee,

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were the words which he now distinguished. Mr. Jellybond's curiosity got the better of him. As he listened he felt sure that his serenader was not a maniac of the raving kind. But who on earth could she be? Hunkering down, he stole across the deep veranda to peep through the creepers which covered the wooden balustrade. He had begun to feel amused; but when, on peeping through the leaves, he discovered Miss Spice, he collapsed upon the floor and rolled about in an ecstasy of silent mirth.

Recovering himself, he peeped again, and watched her for a little as she stood throwing up her arms, tossing her curls from side to side, fluttering her ribbons, and writhing herself into attitudes which were painfully indicative of her earnestness.

But what was to be done? The weird chant seemed likely to continue until he yielded, and the position was embarrassing. If his own servants or any stray passer-by should hear her and be attracted by the noise, it would be known all over the country-side to-morrow that Mr. Jellybond had been serenaded by Miss Spice, and he would be made ridiculous forever. The thought was intolerable. But how to get rid of her? If she had not made such a row he might have appeared, acting on another of his principles, that which inclined him to make the most of the good things the gods sent him; but under the circumstances he was too wary to commit himself.

Suddenly a brilliant idea occurred to him. He thought he saw a way not only to silence her for the present but to quench her flame forever.

On all fours he crept back across the veranda, and noiselessly entered the house. In a few minutes he reappeared at the window; but this time he pretended to open it, making as much clatter as possible. Then he raised a large bath, which he had brought from his dress-

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ing-room, walked heavily with it to that part of the veranda whence the sounds arose, balanced it for a moment on the rail: "Confound those cats!" he said, and flung the water, with a swish, plump onto the devoted head of poor little Miss Spice.

Mr. Jellybond heard a half-drowned shriek as he retired to the window. Thence, by the bright moonlight, he watched the little woman, with dripping garments clinging to her limbs, the skimpy tail of her dress dragging behind her and making her look like a white bantam on a wet day, as she stumbled across the lawn and down the drive.

"It won't do you any harm, you dear," he said to himself, in his kind-hearted way.

He had taken the water from the warm-water tap, so as not to give her too much of a shock. He was such a thoughtful man.

CHAPTER XVII

THE day after Miss Spice's serenade, in the early morning, Babs was sitting at her dressing-table having her hair dressed by Bertha, her maid.

The glass in front of her was tilted so that she could not see herself when she looked up—a sure sign that Babs was out of sorts. She was at a difficult age, and she had her bad days—days of disgust with everything—when everybody irritated her more or less, and she irritated everybody.

"Miss Lorraine, you've got out of bed wrong way first this morning, and if you slap me again I'll have to go and complain to your ma," Bertha was saying, as she wiped the eye which was watering copiously from a back-handed knock from Babs.

"You can go and tell the devil if you like," Babs ejaculated.

"Your language is most unbecoming, miss."

"It's no business of yours what my language is," Babs snapped. "Your duty is to brush my hair and hold your tongue."

Bertha tried again, but her pretty, dimpled face was crumpled with a threat of tears—one of which fell at last, splash, on her young mistress's neck.

Babs looked round.

"Are you crying, Bertha?" she exclaimed. "Good gracious! what will you do next?"

Bertha took out her pocket-handkerchief and sobbed. Babs bent her head and reflected a moment.

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"I'm sorry if I've been horrid," she said, at last, in an altered voice. "It isn't you, you know, it's myself that's all wrong. There, stop crying, and I'll give you—" she looked about for something on her dressing-table—"I'll give you this brooch. See how pretty it is! Gold filigree."

"I don't want any brooches, thank you," Bertha replied, with one eye on the ornament and the other on her own dignity. "I only want to be treated like a human being, and given the credit for it when I'm doing my best. You've got everything in this world provided for you, Miss Lorraine, that's worth having. If you'd got to work for the bare necessities of life, ill or well, wet days or fine, in the mood or out of the mood, and keep a smiling countenance, you'd know the difference. Surely it wouldn't cost you much to have a little consideration for me that has nothing but what I earn—and has lost so much."

Bertha referred to her parents, who were dead. Her father had been a respectable tenant farmer, ruined by bad times; and service was a come-down in the world for Bertha.

But Babs had heard that plaint before, and was not in the mood to be moved by it that morning; it merely bored her.

"Well, leave off sniffing, anyway," she said, giving the mirror in front of her a push to bring it back to its place. "Be amiable and talk about something. Is there any news? If you were more entertaining I shouldn't be so irritable. By-the-way, what's become of Susannah? Why was she sent away in such a hurry?"

Bertha pursed up her mouth.

"Eh?" said Babs, impatiently.

"I'm ordered not to tell you, because it isn't proper for young ladies to know," Bertha answered, with rigid propriety.

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"Oh, then it's sure to be something interesting," Babs ejaculated. "I'll have to ferret it out, I suppose. What on earth are all these mysteries about, Bertha? I'm always wondering. Has Susannah got another place?"

"No, miss; she's been very bad."

"Wicked?"

"Well, a little of that too. But I meant ill."

"Is she ill now?" Babs demanded.

"Yes," Bertha answered, "and she's starving too. Her mother's so poor she hasn't clothes to cover her, nor proper food to give her to eat."

"What would be proper food?" Babs asked.

"Oh, fowls and jellies and wine—anything strengthening, you know," said Bertha.

"Why hasn't mamma sent her all that she requires?" Babs demanded.

Bertha pursed up her mouth again.

"I shall go straight to mamma and ask her," said Babs.

"You'd better not, miss; take my advice," Bertha conjured her.

Babs gave her the snub which is ever ready, by way of reward, for the gratuitous givers of good advice.

When she was dressed she went down-stairs. The rest of the party were already seated at breakfast. Babs burst into the room, slammed the door after her, and took her own seat at table in noisy haste.

"My dear child!" Mrs. Kingconstance exclaimed; "where are your manners?"

Babs frowned at her interrogatively.

"You haven't said good-morning to anybody."

"Good-morning, everybody," Babs snapped.

The greeting was received with ironical bows by Julia and Montacute.

"You've put on that shabby frock again, Babs," Mrs. Kingconstance proceeded. "I told you not to."

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"I forgot," said Babs.

"Forgot, my dear child!" her mother exclaimed. "You must not forget. How would it be if everybody forgot as you do? I must request you not to forget again. What is the matter with you this morning? You look anything but amiable."

"I'm not amiable," said Babs.

"Then you ought to be," her mother said. "You have nothing to make you unamiable. If you had, I don't know what you would be like. You should really try to cultivate more gracious manners. Look at Mr. Jellybond Tinney. He has had every kind of reverse and trouble in his life, yet he's always cheery."

"Oh, don't quote Mr. Jellybond Tinney to me," said Babs. "I hate him. I hate his big, soft hands; I hate his smug face; I hate the way he walks. He's a beast."

"I should think that's done you good, Babs," said Montacute.

"What's the matter, Babs?" Miss Kingconstance asked, kindly. "What have you got on your mind?"

"All the misery there is in the world," Babs rejoined. "Just think of somebody within a stone's throw of you dying of hunger, while you have too much to eat!"

"My dear child," said her mother, "what can put such morbid ideas into your head? No deserving person would ever be allowed to die of hunger here."

"Susannah is dying of hunger," said Babs.

The ladies changed countenance.

"Susannah is *not* a deserving person, and her name must not be mentioned," Mrs. Kingconstance admonished her, emphatically.

"Oh, all right. But I want to know—" Babs was beginning.

"You shall know nothing upon that subject," her mother declared.

"But if Susannah is ill and hungry and cold—"

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"Babs, once for all, I insist," Mrs. Kingconstance interrupted, as sternly as it was in her to speak. "You must drop that subject."

"I see," said Babs, defiantly; "the Lord did not die for Susannah, evidently."

"Really, you are a wicked girl," her mother exclaimed, "and I feel it my duty to punish you. You must go to the school-room and stay there for the rest of the day."

"Thank goodness!" said Babs, jumping up. "I shall have some time to myself. Take care of dear Julia."

She flung out of the room as she had entered it, slamming the door after her.

"I don't know what to do with that child, she is so tiresome," said Mrs. Kingconstance, plaintively.

"Let her alone, I should think," her sister-in-law suggested.

"But she must be corrected."

"There's a time for everything," Miss Kingconstance reminded her.

"I wish the holidays were over and Miss Minton were back," Mrs. Kingconstance ejaculated.

Babs waylaid her aunt as she passed the school-room door, and appealed to her on behalf of Susannah. Miss Kingconstance was usually sympathetic and anxious to help in any case of distress; but in this instance she was as obdurate as her sister-in-law.

The moment Babs mentioned Susannah she stiffened.

"Susannah is a wicked girl," she said, in a hard voice. "I will do nothing for her." She set her lips when she had spoken, and went her way.

"You're all very sweet and Christian to poor Susannah," Babs called after her.

Mrs. Kingconstance was bringing up her daughters on the old plan—having all the facts of life carefully concealed from them, and leaving them to depend upon their

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own primitive instincts for guidance, since they had no knowledge to help them. Babs was quite at a loss to imagine any sufficient reason for all this stern contempt for Susannah. She spent a good part of the day alone in the school-room, sitting in the window with a book open on her lap, thinking about it. She saw her mother and aunt go for a drive together after luncheon, and then she saw Montacute and Julia scamper off together on their ponies ; but she hadn't the slightest wish to join them. She was altogether indolent and indifferent to them all, so long as the sun shone in at the open window where she was sitting and the air was sweet. But as the day advanced the sun disappeared, the wind began to rise, and the old trees rocked drearily. Babs was always susceptible to atmospheric influences. The long, quiet, idle hours in the school-room had done her good. Her nervous irritability had subsided, and she was feeling more like her normal self, when the weather changed. Had the calm continued, she might have stayed in the school-room happily until she had permission to leave it ; but the rising gale had the effect of exciting her to action. As she heard it swish through the trees and saw the great branches tossed and torn by it she longed to be out in the open ; she imagined herself, with outstretched arms, sustained by the wind, floating on it, borne away by it to some ecstatic region where it was all ease and beauty and brightness. She thought she would like to take Susannah with her. Poor Susannah ! Babs's heart contracted when she thought how very little ease and beauty and brightness she had had in her life. How horrid it was of her mother and aunt not to help the poor girl ! But why shouldn't she, Babs, help her ? She had money to give her to buy covering, but the food was the difficulty. She had had her luncheon sent to her in the school-room, so that they would know down-stairs that she was shut up, and it would not

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do to show herself. She must get the food in some other way. It never occurred to her that money would buy food as well as covering. She had got one idea into her clever head, and that idea was that food, simply and literally, and not the means to obtain it, was the proper thing to take to Susannah. And Bertha had said that "good things" were the most suitable, and had particularly mentioned fowls. Babs did not care much for fowls herself, but she thought it likely that they possessed some quality specially adapted to do good under the circumstances.

Fowls ! How was she to get them ? There were certain to be some in the larder. What a nuisance it was that she was shut up ! She did not hesitate to leave the school-room when she felt inclined ; she only drew the line at showing herself to the servants. But the question of fowls still occupied her. There were plenty about the place. The children had hen-houses and pet fowls of their own. Montacute's were Cochin China, Julia's were golden pheasant, her own were black Spanish—and hers were by far the finest of the lot, the best cared for, and the fattest. The children were supposed to look after their pets themselves for discipline—to teach them kindness, and inspire some sense of responsibility ; but there was always some one to feed Miss Babs's pets for her when she forgot them, as not infrequently happened for days together.

Babs was just thinking how unfair it was that she should, merely for her amusement, possess so many of these necessities for starving women, when she suddenly saw the possibility of turning her fowls to account. She did not stop a moment to bring her idea to perfection by careful consideration. That it seemed feasible at first sight was enough for her. She was too impulsive to think, to delay the execution of any new project for a moment.

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Forgetful of everything else, she jumped down from her perch on the window-sill, pulled her garden-hat off its peg, put it on, wrong side foremost in her haste, and dashed down-stairs and out of the house.

Bertha, the maid, from a gallery up-stairs, saw her flying across the hall, and mentally ejaculated: "Miss Babs again! Whatever is she up to now?"

Babs ran on and turned down a little shady by-path on her left, at the end of which was a door leading into the stable-yard. She crossed the yard without meeting any one, but was stopped for a moment at the other end by a six-barred gate which divided it from the farm-yard beyond. The gate was locked; but Babs climbed up it without hesitation. On the top she caught her foot in her dress, and fell in a heap to the ground on the other side. "Confound my petticoats!" she ejaculated. She was dazed and bruised, and had to hold by the gate for a few seconds to steady herself before she set off again. On she went, however, limping a little at first, between great stacks, until she came to another door in a low wall which led into a paddock. In the paddock on the left of this door were the pigsties, and on the right were the children's hen-houses and accommodation for their pets generally. At the farther end of the row of pigsties there was a spacious room, with a furnace-place, boilers, and every convenience for slaying pigs and curing hams and bacon. At the end of the room there was a great pile of cord-wood. A hatchet lay on the ground beside the pile. In the centre was a large butcher's block. On the lime-washed walls there were innumerable hooks.

Babs's big black Spanish fowls were wandering all over the paddock. She began to chase them, and succeeded in catching one and driving three others into the bacon-room. She had taken the largest that came, without regard to age or sex. Having shut the door, she tore a strip from her petticoat, tied together the legs

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of the fowl she had caught, and hung it, head downward, from one of the hooks. Then she caught the other three fowls, and hung them up in the same way. When the last was secured, she took them all down together and prepared to start. But, besides being very heavy, the poor fowls were very strong ; and they flapped and struggled and cackled so furiously she could hardly hold them. What was to be done ? It would be impossible to carry them along the public road kicking and screeching like that. Babs looked about her in despair, and her eye lighted on the hatchet. A cold shiver shook every sensitive fibre of her frame. " But somebody will have to do it," she said to herself ; and then there flashed through her mind the text, " Bear ye one another's burdens."

A curious state of exaltation succeeded that first cold shiver. In a perfect frenzy of haste, she tore another strip from her petticoat, bound the four black fowls together by their legs, and laid them on the block. " An acceptable sacrifice," occurred to her as she did it. But the fowls squirmed about in all directions, and she was obliged to tie their heads together as well as their legs, to keep them quiet on the block. Her religious excitement increased, though her blood ran cold and hot. In all ages the cruelest deeds have been done in the name of some deity. The modern vivisectionist cants about " suffering humanity " to cover his crimes ; and that catchword, coming into her mind, acted like a lash upon Babs. Had she hesitated a moment—had she transferred a scrap of her pity for suffering humanity to her poor old hens—she could not have done it. But, as it was, she seized the hatchet, raised it, and brought it down with all her might. The instant it fell, however, she let it go and rushed from the place. Her pony, which was grazing near, came cantering up to her. Glad of the support of any living creature, she flung her arms round

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his neck and hugged him close. Her heart beat wildly; she thought she must suffocate. But presently, recovering herself, she returned to the bacon-room. She tried to lure the pony in with her for company; but when he got to the door he sniffed suspiciously and refused to enter.

“Off with you, then!” she exclaimed, giving him a sounding slap, which sent him cantering across the paddock, and served to brace up her own nerves again to action.

The fowls had, in their last struggles, fallen from the block to the ground, where the four black bodies lay—still united by their legs—their heads remaining together in a little heap on the block. They seemed to be dead, and Babs seized them without hesitation; but the moment she touched them, they quivered and shot out their legs in a last convulsive shudder. Babs dropped them and ran; and it was some minutes before she could control her distaste enough to touch them again.

At last, however, taking a little cardinal cape from her shoulders, she flung the fowls and their heads into it in desperate haste, and set off with the bundle at full speed across the paddock, over two adjoining fields—forgetting for once, in her excitement, the terrible bull which was sometimes loose in one of them—and so, through a gap in the hedge, to the high-road, where she was obliged to slacken speed for a while to recover breath.

Had Babs not been in such a hurry she might have heard a smothered guffaw from the top of the wood-stack just as she made her final exit from the bacon-room.

Mr. Clodd Dulditch, having been sent there to chop wood, had just climbed the stack, and was preparing to indulge in a siesta on the top when Babs appeared. She never thought of looking up there, and thus he

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found himself an undisturbed spectator of the whole episode. He was hugely tickled ; his mouth had been on the broad grin all the time ; and when the dead fowls kicked out at Babs and sent her flying he could hardly contain himself.

“ She be a rum shot,” he reflected, when his mirth had subsided a little and he was gathering himself up in order to climb down from his eminent position. “ She be a rum shot, an’ no mistake. But wotiver could she ‘a’ done it fur ? If I’d ‘a’ knowed wot she were up to, I’d ‘a’ done it fur ‘er meself wi’ the greatest o’ pleasure.” Clodd said it mincingly ; he always talked fine when he felt particularly gallant. “ But she did it all of a ‘eap like, an’ I’d no idee she were going so fur. Howsumiver, I’ll not split on ‘er. An’, wot’s more, I’ll clean up after ‘er. A pretty pigeon she is to do aught on the sly,” he continued, looking round contemptuously on the traces Babs had left of her deed. “ Now, supposin’ any one found this ‘ere place in such a state o’ carnage, my eyes ! what a to-do and inquiree there’d be. Oh no !”

And Clodd the Lazy trudged off for water with which “ to swill up.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THERE are of the majority who do not believe in the inner voice ; so also are there people who are color-blind. But since the beginning of tradition there has been an unbroken record in evidence of the fact that there is in mankind a guiding power which has been known at various times by various names. Some have called it inspiration, others intuition. It has been positively personified as an angel—the angel of many messages ; or, more vaguely, as the dæmon or genius of some one person. The Quaker described it as the spirit that moved him. We have some vague idea of the conditions favorable to the development of this power—we know, that is to say, that it can be cultivated, as the seed that is put in the ground is cultivated, by careful enrichment of the soil, only it is not sowed as a seed—at least, we have no knowledge of the fact if it be. All we know is that some of us find it in ourselves, and that by no effort of will can we control it. We cannot make it speak. If we question it, there is no response. It comes into our consciousness we know not how ; all we know is that it does come. And it comes at the right moment, too, when we have real need of it, not when we merely think that we have. In moments of disheartenment it comes for our comfort, in moments of peril for our help, in moments of doubt for our enlightenment, and in moments of difficulty for our guidance. It does not follow that we shall always understand it ; but sooner or later its meaning is made clear.

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All her conscious life Babs had been subject to that inward monitor, that power which shapes a phrase in the mind at critical times, and she had accepted the occurrence without doubt or question, and as a matter of course. Had she thought of it at all, she would have assumed that the same thing happened to everybody, that grown-up people understood all about it, and that she, too, would understand all about it by-and-by. She had spoken of it to Cadenhurst, and he had perfectly comprehended her ; but as a rule she did not allude to it. Sensitive people do not allude to subjects that are sacred to themselves, unless they are sure of sympathetic attention.

Of all the suggestions that had come to Babs, " suffering humanity " was the most potent in its urging. From the moment the phrase shaped itself in her consciousness it laid hold of her. As she proceeded along the high-road after the ordeal through which she had just struggled the words ran on in her mind incessantly, and as they repeated themselves she experienced a delightful sense of exhilaration. The heavy old hens made her arms ache ; but the pain only added to her excitement. She was like a fanatic who feels no fine enthusiasm of devotion without actual bodily suffering.

Presently she had to leave the high-road and plunge into the forest of Danehurst. Here there was little more than a track for her to follow ; but she knew her way. On either hand there were sloping banks, covered with moss and ferns and tendrils of ground-ivy. Languidly the old trees which formed the fringe of the forest, oak and elm and beech, tossed their heavy limbs about, and swayed and groaned in the rising gale. Farther on there were only pines, dark pines, with waving plumes that cast strange, deep shadows on the slight figure as it passed beneath them. As Babs proceeded her spirits gradually rose to a still higher pitch of awe and exaltation. In the dreary souging of the wind through the

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forest she fancied she heard human plaints. Suffering humanity was all about her, urging her on to the rescue.

The cottage stood on a lonely spot deep in the wood. There were no other dwellings within a mile. To reach it Babs was obliged to turn off from the main track and follow an indistinct grassy path through a broad glade. She had passed the place often enough, but had never been inside it. Externally there were no signs of the great distress she expected to find. On the contrary, suffering humanity had evidently been busy putting it all in order. The high thatched roof had been newly mended, the garden was well planted, the privet hedge which surrounded it was carefully clipped, and the flowering creepers which covered the front of the house were neatly trimmed and trained.

Babs paused in the little porch to recover her breath before she knocked. There was a light in one of the windows. There, in the heart of the forest, the days closed in early, and doubtless the tiny diamond panes kept out even the dim twilight that already reigned under the trees. Babs heard a voice mumbling monotonously inside. The tone was one of complaint; but no words reached her. Her heart began to thump against her side—she did not know why; but, lest her courage should fail her, she hastily knocked. The voice mumbled on, however. Her gentle tap had evidently not been heard; but she did not knock again. She feared she might run away if she were kept waiting a moment longer in suspense. She therefore lifted the latch and walked in; and just at that moment the voice ceased speaking, and all was still.

The door opened into a little square passage. There was another door opposite to it and one on either hand. That on her right was wide open, and as she softly shut the front door she turned towards it. It was the room in which she had noticed the light, which, as she now saw,

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came from a gaudy oil lamp that stood on the high, old-fashioned mantel-piece. She saw the person whose voice she had heard outside—an elderly woman in a cap with flaring red ribbons, who was sitting shuffling a pack of cards at a small table which stood beside the fireplace. She saw a wood fire blazing on the hearth, and a general air of cottage comfort ; she saw preparations for a feast on the well-scoured dresser ; but, most of all, she saw a tall stout man standing negligently by the hearth. His eyes were fixed on the ground. In one hand he held a tumbler with some steaming liquid in it ; with the fingers of the other he kept up an incessant little tap-tapping on the wood-work against which he leaned. There was no mistaking the man. Babs would have recognized his shadow alone had she seen it by the dying daylight—Mr. Jellybond Tinney, whom she did not love.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney was known to be a good, kind, benevolent gentleman ; the cottagers all about heaped every adjective of the kind upon him ; and Babs's immediate idea was that he had forestalled her ; that suffering humanity would owe its relief to him—the wretch !—and not to her. All her trouble had been for nothing, then ! Had it been anybody but him it would not so much have mattered ; but Mr. Jellybond Tinney !

Babs was seized upon by one of those sudden revolutions of feeling to which she was subject.

“ How dare you ! ” she cried.

The occupants of the room started. They had not heard her enter. Mr. Jellybond's glass fell with a crash on the brick floor. The old woman jumped up, flinging the cards from her wildly, and overturning the table. The sudden cry from out of the darkness had sounded with supernatural effect, and at the first glance it was easy to mistake the angelic face, framed in fair hair and with big eyes gleaming angrily, for that of an apparition. The old woman gazed in terror ; but Mr. Jelly-

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bond recognized Babs at once. She gave him no time to act, however. When she had spoken she sprang forward, swung the four headless, bleeding fowls, and flung them in his face, then turned and fled from the spot.

The heads of the fowls struck him on the cheek, their bodies encircled his neck in a cold, clammy, defiling embrace, which sent a shudder through him.

"It's a bad omen," the old woman gasped, and his own fears confirmed the prediction.

CHAPTER XIX

BABS fled back through the forest far faster than she had come. The wind was with her and seemed to pursue her, and all about her were strange sounds—sighs and groans, and heavy thuds as of inert bodies falling helplessly. She had a horrid vision of the big, stout man—an incongruous figure in black frock-coat and tall hat, with a glass of steaming liquid in his hand—following hard after her to catch and drag her back to Thorne Lodge to be murdered by the witch in red ribbons who was standing at the door waiting with the knife ready.

But as she emerged from the dark pine-wood the hobgoblins gradually retired behind her, and by the time she reached the high-road, very much out of breath, she had begun to cast about in her own mind for something to comfort her. Most of all she wanted somebody to talk to. She looked up and down the wind-swept wood and found the prospect dreary. In one direction there was home, the very thought of which depressed her ; in the other, far away, was Cadenhouse—far away in every sense of the word ; but in the same direction, near at hand, was Ally Spice. When Babs was in a talkative mood she was in the habit of using Ally Spice as a target to talk at ; and now the thought of Ally was reassuring, as the commonplaces of life are reassuring when we find ourselves able to attend to them after moments of difficulty and distress.

Mrs. Sophia Pepper answered the door at the Cross Roads Cottage.

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"I want to see Ally," said Babs. "Is she at home?"

"Very much at home," said Mrs. Pepper, grimly.

"But I don't know if she'll be able to see you."

"Why? Is she ill?"

"She is."

"In bed?"

"No; but it would be better if she was."

"What's the matter?" said Babs.

"A sort of chill, it seems," Mrs. Pepper replied, "and something on her mind, I'd have said, if she'd had a mind. But her nerves are all wrong, anyhow."

"Is it serious, do you think?" said Babs.

"I can't say," the old lady answered. "She's pretty bad, and it's possible she'll be worse. But come in; I dare say she'll see you."

As Mrs. Sophia Pepper led the way to the drawing-room she muttered to herself, as she had done at intervals all that day:

"I knew she was sickening for something when I saw her antics last night."

Miss Spice was lying on the couch with a shawl over her. She turned a flushed and feverish face to Babs, and held out a hot, dry hand.

"Leave us alone," she said to her aunt, in a tragic manner.

When Mrs. Sophia Pepper had withdrawn, Miss Spice raised herself on her elbow and whispered:

"I did it."

"Did what?" said Babs, all at sea.

"I did it," Miss Spice repeated, "and I made a great mistake." A fit of coughing interrupted her. "But I will tell you," she proceeded, as soon as she could speak, "and then you can judge for yourself."

A singular gravity settled upon Babs. She had begun to suspect what was coming, and found it hard to keep her countenance.

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"When you first made the suggestion," Miss Spice continued, "I said I could not do such a thing, and I went on saying so to myself till the last moment—"

"Didn't you get my letter?" Babs interrupted.

"What letter?"

"I wrote and told you not to do it on any account."

"I never got any letter to that effect."

"I must see to that," said Babs, frowning. "I expect Mr. Clodd Dulditch can explain. Well?" She settled herself to hear the story.

"Oh, I wish it were well," sighed Miss Spice. "I got desperate. I felt it was my only chance. Look at all the women about here; what sort of lives do they have, I ask you? I said the thing could not be done; but all the time I was seeing in myself if it could. Then last night, after I went up-stairs, it occurred to me to seek a sign, and three times the sign came 'No.' The third time I said to myself, 'That settles it!' and I took off my dress and hung it up in the cupboard. Then—all at once—I don't know what came over me—I got out my white muslin in frantic haste—I put it on—and my blue ribbons. It was as light as day outside. I heard aunt snoring. I went down-stairs." She paused for breath.

Babs was following the narrative with keen interest. She had no longer any inclination to laugh.

"You see it was Fate," Miss Spice continued. "When I got outside I felt conspicuous in my white dress, so I returned for a big shawl."

"Returning is bad luck," said Babs.

"Yes. The moment I had done it I knew it was bad luck; but I could not tell then whether the bad luck would be in the going or in the staying. But at any rate I went. I had to go. When I got to the house I took off my shawl and left it lying on a seat. There was a light in one room up-stairs. I felt sure he was there. I went and stood just beneath. I felt very

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strange—not like myself. It was some time before I could find voice to begin. But after humming a few notes under my breath, suddenly I felt impelled to send up one that was loud, clear, and melodious on the night air. The nightingales were singing to him ; should I do less than they ? Having once begun, it was easy enough to go on. And oh, my dear, I sang like one *inspired*. The very birds paused to listen. I chose a few words of comfort—

“ You did not sing my serenade, then ? ”

“ No, my dear. I tell you I was inspired. I sang with pathetic power. I never knew how I could sing before. All at once the light went out—the window was opened. My heart stood still ; but I went on singing. I heard his step as he crossed the veranda.” Here Miss Spice was again interrupted by a fit of coughing. “ Imagine,” she added, hoarsely—“ imagine—would you believe it ? ”

“ What ? ” Babs gasped.

“ Before I had time to step back,” Miss Spice proceeded, with tragic emphasis, “ or had any idea of what was coming, he emptied a tub of water right down on my head ! ”

“ Oh ! ” cried Babs, and burst out laughing.

“ You may laugh,” said Miss Spice, “ but he *did*—right down on my head, and on my muslin dress, and on my blue ribbons, and on my ringlets, and, what is worse, he said, ‘ Cats ! ’ ”

Babs stopped laughing. There was a ring of real suffering in Miss Spice’s voice as she pronounced the last words that sobered her.

“ Ally, I am sorry,” she said. “ I blame myself.”

“ No, my dear,” said poor little Miss Spice, “ it was not you, it was Fate. If I had not made myself ridiculous about that man in one way I should have done so in another, and perhaps a worse. But now I know him. For I tell you I shall never, never, *never* believe that he

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thought that I was—*cats*. The flame is quenched forever, and it may be that I am quenched too."

"Oh, don't say that, Miss Spice!"

"I am very ill, Babs," said the little woman, "and it serves me right."

Babs rose.

"I shall always blame myself," she said. "But I won't talk to you any more now. You're exciting yourself too much. If you'll let me, I'll come to-morrow to see how you are."

Miss Spice pressed her hand and let her go.

Babs was in a state of extreme dissatisfaction when she left Miss Spice. Everything had gone wrong with her lately, and she was almost ready to repent of her misdeeds—not because they were misdeeds, but because they had gone wrong, which is the commonest cause of repentance.

"I wonder what Cadenhouse would do under the circumstances," she said to herself; and instantly there occurred to her a most significant word—"penance."

"I've never done penance," she said; and prepared for an interesting experience.

Babs sat down on a bank to consider. What was there that she could do by way of penance? Of course she might go straight to her mother and confess, which would be penance enough; but then why should she bother her mother? It was her own business, not her mother's, and she must settle it herself. She looked about her. The wind had dropped, but a damp fog was rising, and the day was drearier than ever. Babs had walked a long way, and her feet were aching. She looked down at them, and remembered that she had come out in her house-shoes. The shoes had suffered from the roughness of the ground; but what did that matter?—what did anything matter? Why should she wear shoes at all? At the thought she sat up straight.

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An idea had come to her ; and before she could have expressed it in words, she had whipped off her shoes and stockings, and was walking home barefooted. There was little chance of being seen in the gathering fog and darkness ; but had it been bright noonday, Babs would have performed her penance, and only have thought it the more efficacious for any extra inconvenience it might have caused her. As it was, it was pretty severe, for her feet were tender and the road was rough. The first part of the way was bad enough, but it was the gravel on the drive that tried her most.

She slipped round the house to a side door, that she might steal in unobserved ; but before she could open it, she was startled by hearing some one call, softly :

“ Miss-s-s-s !”

Turning, she saw Clodd peeping round the corner, and gesticulating in such a way as to excite surprise in the breast of the most guileless observer ; but he conceived himself to be acting with great caution.

“ What’s the matter, Clodd ?” said Babs, going up to him, forgetful of the shoes and stockings which she was carrying conspicuously in her hands. “ What do you want ? You do exasperate me ! You’re always making mysteries. What do you mean by it ?”

Clodd looked down at her bare feet and grinned.

“ I’m not the only one,” he remarked.

“ Don’t be impudent,” said Babs. “ Which reminds me. What did you do with that second letter I gave you to give to Miss Spice the day I sent you with that parcel of books ?”

Clodd scratched his red head ; then he felt about in various pockets to gain time.

“ Didn’t she get it ?” he said, at last.

“ No, she did not,” said Babs, “ and I’d like to know why.”

“ I wonder,” said Clodd.

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They stood looking at each other in silence for a perceptible interval, then Babs gave it up. Her lightning methods of mind were impotent against the dogged jog-trot of Clodd's cart-horse intellect.

"What do you want now?" she snapped.

"I come to tell you I done it," he answered, deliberately.

"Done what?" she demanded. "Everybody seems to be doing something original."

"I cleaned up," said Clodd.

"Cleaned up what?"

"The blood," he rejoined in an awful whisper.

Babs went hot and cold. The murder was out, then! What should she do?

"I thort I'd tell yew, miss," the ingenuous Clodd proceeded, "because yew might 'a' bin bothered when yew thort on as 'ow some 'un as oould 'a' split on yew might 'a' gone an' foun' it an' 'a' made en-qui-rees. *I'll not split.* An' now's I's cleared up, no 'un carn't find out nawthink."

"How do you know I did it?" Babs asked, incautiously.

"'Cos I seed you," said Clodd.

Babs's mind took a moment to travel to the bacon-room and back; but she could not conceive how it had been possible for him to see her. She gave that point up, however—time pressed.

"Is that all?" she said, impatiently.

"I'll not split," Clodd repeated.

"Thank you," she rejoined, haughtily.

She turned to go as she spoke. Clodd's countenance fell; but it brightened when Babs stopped and put her hand into her pocket. It fell again when Babs uttered an exclamation as if she had lost something, and brightened once more when she seemed to find what she wanted.

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"There," she said, giving him what appeared to be a sixpence.

Clodd looked at it suspiciously.

"It's half a sovereign," said Babs. "If you don't want it, give it back to me."

Clodd hastily put it in his pocket.

"Thankee, miss, I'm sure," he said, in his best manner. "If iver you want to do it agin, yew know," he added, confidentially, "don't yew go fur to do it yerself, as isn't proper for a young lady like yew. Cook there wouldn't do it—not was it ever so; nor I niver heerd tell o' one as would—though preps it were laziness pervents 'em more nor del-ee-kay-cie. Howsumiver, I niver yet knowed a woman turn butcher, nor niver heerd o' one followin' that trade, neither. So I ses, miss, as I said afore"—he looked round cautiously, then whispered, with his hand to the side of his mouth—"if iver you've a mind to do it agin—"

"A mind?" Babs ejaculated.

"If iver you've a mind to do it agin," the imperturbable Clodd repeated, a trifle more emphatically, perhaps, "tip us a wink. Clodd'll not split."

He seemed to think that this put a proper period to the proceedings, so he touched his cap ceremoniously when he had spoken, scraped his foot back on the gravel by way of a bow, and prepared to retire.

Babs was gone in a moment. She did not even wait to thank him.

"Clodd," whispered a voice close beside him.

Clodd started and looked all round in a bewildered way.

"Clodd, I'm here, at the window," the voice continued, cautiously, as if afraid of being overheard. "I want you to tell me all about it."

It was Julia who spoke.

"Not me, miss," said Clodd, decisively, going up to the window. "If yew'd 'a' bin near enough to this 'ere

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window fur yew to 'ear all that passed w'en yew come spyin'—a listenin' in a way that's not honest to wot yew'd no call to 'ear—yew'd 'a' 'eard me say (an' say-in's sweerin') *I'll not split.*"

"But, Clodd, *I'd not split* if you told me," said Julia, persuasively.

"It can't be done," the incorruptible Clodd firmly persisted.

"Not if I pay you?" Julia asked, insinuatingly.

"What'll yew pay me?" Clodd demanded, with a rapid fall from his incorruptible manner.

"I'll give you half a sovereign," Julia replied.

"It can't be done for that," he declared.

"I'll give you two," said Julia.

Clodd took time to consider.

"Honor bright?" he said, at last.

"Yes, to-morrow. I haven't them here."

"No, no," Clodd chuckled. "You pay right down on the nail, Miss Julia. We all know yew're slippery."

"Do you doubt my word, sir?" Julia exclaimed.

"I do," said Clodd.

"I could get mamma to send for you and make you tell, if I liked," she threatened.

"Yew can take a 'orse to the water, Miss Julia, but yew can't make him drink," Clodd slowly enunciated.

Julia reflected a moment, then suddenly changed her tactics.

"Wait here, Clodd," she said. "I'll go and fetch you the money."

Clodd covered his large mouth with his large hand to smother an irrepressible chuckle. He thought his way of turning an honest penny exceedingly humorous.

Julia returned immediately, and, taking hold of his hand, so that they might not drop the money between them in the dark, she deposited the two small coins in it.

"Now," she said, "tell me."

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"You're sure you won't split?" he bargained.

"Quite sure. Didn't I say so? Do be quick."

"Well"—he paused, as though he were still reluctant to speak—"this afternoon I seed Miss Babs break down the gate 'atween Westbrook field, that's down i' w'eat this year, an' Farmer Horner's sheep-run; an' she let all t' sheep into our w'eat, an' they've most ruined it."

"Then what did you mean by saying that you'd cleaned up after her?"

"Why, drivin' 'em out and puttin' up t' gate, to be sure."

"Is that all?" Julia exclaimed.

"That is all," Clodd answered, doggedly, "an' enough, too, for the money, it seems ter me."

The first thing Clodd did, after lighting his fire, when he got home that evening (he had lived alone since his mother went as housekeeper to Mr. Jellybond Tinney) was to sit down and indulge in a burst of hilarity. He felt that, upon the whole, the day had been one of the pleasantest he had ever spent.

When his mirth had subsided a little he put his hands in his pockets and drew forth the coins.

"I said I'd not split on 'er," he chuckled.

At first he looked at the coins affectionately. Then, as the firelight flickered on them, his face became more intent.

All at once he knelt down and held them close to the blaze, and looked and looked again, unable to believe his eyes.

At last he exclaimed, turning round as if there were some one present to hear him, and slapping one hand with the other at every note of exclamation:

"Well, desh it! Well, deng it! Wha'd 'a' thort it! If she 'ain't 'a' bin an' gone an' done us arter all! She's a bad 'un, she is!"

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He had discovered himself to be the happy possessor of one half-sovereign only, for Julia, under cover of the darkness, had imposed two sixpences upon him.

"Blast 'er!" said Clodd. "I'll be even wi' 'er yet."

CHAPTER XX

AFTER the witch in red ribbons had uttered her prediction there was a pause, during which Mr. Jellybond Tinney stood looking on the ground intently. One would have thought that he was doing mental arithmetic—and so he was, of a kind; for he was summing up the position and making a rapid calculation of the chances.

"What shall you do?" the witch in red ribbons asked him at last.

"Act," was the laconic rejoinder.

"You was always an actor, Tinney," she observed, admiringly.

"I was always a man of action," he rejoined.

An hour later he might have been seen walking down the village street on his way home. His step was leisurely, as usual, his countenance serene. He had gone to Thorne Lodge and returned by the most public way, so that everybody might see that he had nothing to conceal. He wore a frock-coat that day, and carried a book under his arm, which made him look like a minister of religion; and there was a general expression of supreme content about him which helped the suggestion. It was impossible to localize the expression—it was all over him; but perhaps if it were anywhere specially marked it was in the waggle of his coat-tails. He seemed to be humming a tune to himself as he sauntered through the village, bowing low to this person and giving a patronizing nod to that, his salutation being determined in every

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case by the rank, age, or beauty of the person saluted. The Japps' house looked onto the village street. There was a garden in front of it, and the tall, dark, handsome, determined-looking Florence was standing at the gate. Mr. Jellybond Tinney stopped to make obeisance. His lowest bow was for beauty always.

"You make me think of a flower," he said.

"What flower?" she demanded, bluntly. She had inherited her mother's commanding manner and deep voice, so that the charm of her appearance was much discounted when she spoke.

"A lily."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"A tiger-lily," he ventured.

A softening of the lips showed that she accepted the comparison. She looked away from Mr. Jellybond Tinney down the road. Her eyes were bright, her lips were red, her whole air animated. She was at a perfect moment of life, in high health, with superabundant vitality; but there was a pathetic expression in her eyes, an expression of yearning, of discontent, of reproach, which Mr. Jellybond saw with sympathy and would fain have banished. He understood her better than she understood herself. She suffered the ache of her barren existence without being able to explain it. Mr. Jellybond gazed at her, in serious enjoyment of her beauty, and sighed. He was perfectly sincere. He hated to see her wasting the sweetness of her womanhood in vain vague longings for an object in life.

"I see you so seldom—" he was beginning; but just at that moment Mrs. Japp came waddling down the path towards them. She was a woman of forty-five and well preserved but exceedingly stout.

Mr. Jellybond turned his attention to her at once. He gave her hand an affectionate squeeze.

"So glad to see you," he said—"so glad! But I must

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hurry on. I shall remember this glimpse! *Au revoir*, dear ladies."

He lifted his hat high and hurried away. Mrs. Japp was beaming. Florence compressed her lips.

"You don't look very amiable, my dear," her mother remarked, somewhat tartly. "I should like to know why."

"I should like to know why you seem so pleased about nothing."

"Oh, as to that—" said Mrs. Japp, with an exasperating smile. "You seem to think I'm quite old," she added, perking, as she led the way down the street.

"I seem to think it's my turn," said Florence, under her breath, tragically.

As Mr. Jellybond Tinney walked up the drive to his own house he looked about him complacently. The place was always picturesque; but now, in the gathering gloom, it was more than usually so, and he much appreciated its beauty. Besides, it was his own, a fact which it was always pleasant to remember. "Enjoy as you go along," was a maxim he practised habitually. Every moment we make pleasant for ourselves is something added to the good of life.

While he was waiting for dinner Mr. Jellybond plucked a flower from a pot on the veranda and stuck it jauntily into his buttonhole; and as he did so, he thought of Miss Spice the night before, and was shaken with silent mirth.

"These dear ladies, how funny they are!" he said to himself. He thought that Ally would be easy to deal with, but he was not so sure about Babs, and he had accordingly determined to settle with her first; but exactly how to tackle her was the question. He went up to the great mirror to seek inspiration from his own reflection. It seemed to him that he looked very nice. The addition of the bright buttonhole to his perfectly fitting dress-

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suit was a happy touch. He smiled blandly at the responsive mirror and felt reassured.

"It will be all right," he declared to himself, and then, on a sudden, gravely and silently, he began to dance with extraordinary vigor.

When he had dined he put on a dust-coat and went to Dane Court. He opened the hall door boldly and walked in. There was nobody in the hall. Leaving his hat and overcoat on a chair, he went up-stairs and peeped about. He knew the habits of the family, and found, as he expected, that they were sitting in the blue drawing-room, which they usually occupied when alone. Montacute and Julia were having an altercation. Mrs. Kingconstance requested them to behave themselves, and Miss Kingconstance said something inaudible, but Babs made no sign. Was she there? He ascertained by a simple expedient. He opened the door noiselessly and looked in. No, she was not there. Happy chance! He might perhaps find her alone. But he was nearly caught before he shut the door, for Miss Kingconstance, whose senses were singularly acute, thought she heard something fizzle, and looked round. By the time she turned her head, however, there was nothing to be seen. Her momentary pause to listen had saved Mr. Jellybond. He hoped to find Babs in the school-room, and went to see if she were there. On the way he admonished himself to be circumspect.

Just at that moment, however, Bertha came running down the corridor. He opened his arms and caught her.

"Pretty rosebud!" he said.

Bertha giggled.

"Let me go, sir!" she cried. "There's somebody coming!"

"Give me a kiss, then, quick!" he said.

"For shame, sir!" said Bertha, still giggling and wriggling.

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Suddenly he let her go. Some one was coming.

Bertha would have run past him, but he barred the way.

"Stand still, you little idiot!" he commanded, and involuntarily she obeyed him. "Did you say," he continued, in his ordinary, ponderous manner, "that Miss Lorraine was in the school-room?"

"No, sir—yes, sir. She's been there all day—shut up—naughty—for punishment."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir."

They both listened. All was still again. The sound of footsteps had died away. Mr. Jellybond helped himself to a kiss.

"For shame, sir!" said Bertha, "and you a gentleman!"

"A bird in the hand, my dear, is worth two—er—in the drawing-room," said Mr. Jellybond Tinney. "But be advised. Take care of that head of yours, not to lose it."

"And why not my heart?" she answered, pertly.

"Because the little heart you have doesn't matter. It's a light commodity, a girl's heart, a little air-balloon attached by a string, so that she can let it go and pull it back again. The oftener she lets it go the more fun she has, only she should see to it that the string is fast. But with the head it is different. If you lose your head, it's the devil. Now take me to the school-room and announce me nicely."

Babs was sitting in the window, thinking of Cadenhouse, and longing for the light; but all was mist and murk in the direction of the Tower.

"Miss Lorraine," said Bertha, opening the door, "Mr. Jellybond Tinney wishes to see you."

"Show the brute in," said Babs, indifferently, just turning her head, but not rising.

Mr. Jellybond entered the room and bowed low. Bertha retired, shutting the door after her.

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Babs slightly inclined her head, but the expression of her face made the politeness ironical.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney waited for her to commit herself ; she waited for Mr. Jellybond Tinney.

" May I take a seat ?" he said, at last.

" As many as you like," she answered, shortly, and turned once more to the Tower. There was another pause, during which Mr. Jellybond Tinney blinked contemplatively at Babs and did some mental summing up.

" Miss Babs," he ventured again, " why do you treat me so badly ? have never done you any harm, yet you call me a brute and throw dead fowls at me."

Babs burst out laughing.

" By-the-way," she said, suddenly recovering herself, " what did you do with the fowls ?"

" I came to ask you what you would like me to do with them," Mr. Jellybond was inspired to reply. " I heard that you are supposed to have been here all day, so I have not mentioned your extraordinary conduct this afternoon. I never tell tales."

" Good old gentleman !" said Babs.

Mr. Jellybond writhed, but he held his peace. He had begun under the impression that he had Babs in his power, and that she would recognize the fact and appreciate his magnanimity, but as Babs seemed to have other ideas in her head, he thought it advisable to change his tactics.

" Of course," he proceeded, " if upon reflection it appears to me that I ought to mention your conduct to your mother—"

" You'll do so, however much it may cost you ?" Babs put in. " I know ! And if you do, won't there be a jolly row !" She turned towards him energetically. " Do you know, I love a good row," she exclaimed. " Let's plan it ! You must ' regret that it is your painful duty—' But how about the witch with the red ribbons ? She

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must come in, too, she's so picturesque. Of course I shall deny everything that you assert—that's part of the fun. And I'll invent a lot of things about you. Oh, it will be exciting!"

Mr. Jellybond's jaw had gradually dropped as Babs rattled on. He gazed at her with bent brows in great perplexity.

"You look pained," she observed.

"I am," he answered. "Your flippancy pains me. Your poor mother—"

He shook his head, and left the rest to the imagination. It was a stroke of genius. Babs's volatility was all on the surface, and when the depths below were stirred it disappeared. She had seen her mother's face all distorted with tears on one occasion, and every time she thought of it she prayed that she might never, never suffer that sight again.

Mr. Jellybond saw that she was moved.

"Come, Babs," he said, kindly, "let us make a bargain, you and I. Let us be friends. You must feel that you did not do the right thing this afternoon."

"Well, I was provoked," said Babs, yielding that point.

"But, my dear child, what had I done to provoke you?"

"You had done everything," said Babs, "and left me nothing to do. I had only those wretched fowls to take, and you have such a lot of money you can always be helping poor people. I can so seldom do anything. And when Aunt Lorraine and mamma and everybody were so horrid about Susannah, I would have been some comfort to me to have helped her myself."

Mr. Jellybond Tinney could make nothing of all this.

"Susannah? Who is Susannah?" he asked, in bewilderment.

"Don't you know?" said Babs, in turn surprised.

"Never in my life have I known any one of that name."

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"But she lives at Thorne Lodge."

"No one lives at Thorne Lodge now but the—er—old lady you saw there to-day."

"She used to live there, then."

"Ah, that may be. Now I think of it, when I first came here some disreputable people had the place, but were turned out for not paying their rent."

"I made a mistake, then," said Babs. "I beg your pardon. I'm sorry I threw the fowls at you for nothing."

"Babs," Mr. Jellybond said, solemnly, rising as he spoke, "I freely forgive you. And I only ask one favor. When you do kind things, you keep it to yourself, I'm sure. So do I. And I don't want my visit to that poor old lady at Thorne Lodge to be talked about."

"All right," said Babs. "I'll not mention it. But I say, Mr. Jellybond, just tell me one thing between ourselves, to satisfy my burning curiosity. Last night—did you really think it was 'cats'?"

The question passed through him like an electric shock.

"What do you mean?" he gasped.

She grinned. He took a step towards her.

"Don't shake me!" she exclaimed, in mock alarm. "You'll never make me believe you did think it was 'cats,' and Ally Spice doesn't think you did, either. She's got a bad cold, and doesn't love you any more."

"Then that was your doing?" he exclaimed. "Miss Lorraine Kingconstance, you're a perfect little devil, and I wish everybody connected with you joy of you."

"Thank you," said Babs.

It was a happy home scene of the most reassuring kind that Mr. Jellybond Tinney looked in upon in the blue drawing-room for the second time that evening—at least, so it appeared to him—and his heart warmed to

it. He cultivated all the pleasant emotions. But the appearance of comfort and luxury was purely objective—a mere matter of ornamentation, of subdued lights, harmonious coloring, silken hangings, easy-chairs, chintz and china, pictures and Persian carpets. Everything that could be purchased to help the effect was there; but of that subtle essence which should have flavored the whole, the essence of content—"our best having," which is not to be bought, nor to be had for the asking, but must be earned—there was none.

People talk glibly of sudden changes, but the probability is that in most cases, had they been observant, they would have had ample warning of what was coming. Uneasiness was in the air at Dane Court that evening, and everybody felt it, but no one rendered an account of it to themselves in order to consider it in the light of a premonition. Julia and Montacute, who were seated at a little table playing backgammon, were putting more passion than pleasure into the game. Miss Kingconstance had tried to read, but the rattle of the dice and the squabbles of the players distracted her, and she put down her book in despair. She was sitting now with her elbows on the arms of her chair, her head resting on the cushion at the back, her eyes fixed on the ceiling, and the tips of her slender fingers met in an arch before her—an attitude well calculated to conceal the intense irritation which was working under the deliberate calm of her appearance.

Mrs. Kingconstance was looking a trifle less placid than usual. Her fingers were busy with her lace-work, and it was apparent that her mind was also busy, but with something less agreeable. The truth was, she had been a little put out at dinner because her cook had substituted *sauce Tartare* for the *sauce Hollandaise*, which she was sure she had ordered. Having expected *sauce Hollandaise* all day, and being particularly fond of it, it

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was natural that she should be put out when *sauce Tartare*, to which she was indifferent, appeared. Then, too, as she glanced from time to time at the children, she became aware of the fact that Julia had grown out of her frock. It was a black velvet frock with a crimson sash of soft silk, and had been very becoming to Julia when she first wore it. Then she had been in that ugly stage of a girl's growth when the legs and arms are too thin, the hands too large, and the feet too long, and a short frock was the right thing for her ; but now, on a sudden, she seemed to have filled out, her limbs were almost in proportion, and she was certainly showing too much good leg to be quite nice. This observation caused Mrs. Kingconstance to reflect that the girls were growing up ; and somehow the circumstance made her uneasy. She was only thirty-eight herself, and looked even less in the evening, and she had not had much of a life, after all. The children had been so sweet, too, as little things ; what would they be by-and-by ? And a young mother with her little ones about her is always interesting ; but a mother with grown-up daughters ! What possibilities are left in life for her ? Mrs. Kingconstance began to feel hurried. It was evident that she must be quick if she would have any more joy of her youth.

A slight commotion in the air caused her to look up. Mr. Jellybond Tinney stood in the doorway, gazing at her.

" Am I disturbing you ? " he asked.

" Pleasantly," she replied, holding out her hand to him. He seemed to have come in answer to her thoughts, and she was too startled to utter another word ; but he saw how it was with her, and sat down, feeling well satisfied.

The others were equally pleased to see him, but for different reasons. Relations between Julia and Montacute were becoming strained to the uttermost, and

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Julia was glad of an excuse to put an end to the game in dispute by adroitly upsetting the little table on which they were playing as she jumped up to greet Mr. Jellybond. Julia liked him for the nice things he took occasion to say about her dark eyes, her raven hair, and the delicate damask of her cheeks, when by chance they were alone together. Miss Kingconstance did not like him, but she welcomed him now for the relief he brought her from the rattle of the dice.

"And what has everybody been doing?" said Mr. Jellybond.

Julia sat down on the floor beside her mother and rested her head against her knee caressingly.

"We went for a walk together, Montacute and I," she said. "It was rather jolly because of the storm. We nearly caught a young hare."

"We should have caught it if you hadn't shrieked, 'Oh, what a sweetie-sweetie!' just when you should have held your tongue," said Montacute.

"Of course I can do nothing right for you!" Julia rejoined, with a provoking smile. "If Babs had been there it would have been different."

"Yes, it would have been different," he answered, dryly.

"Poor Babs!" said Miss Kingconstance.

"Why 'poor,' Lorraine, if you please?" said Mrs. Kingconstance; then, turning to Mr. Jellybond, "You can guess why she is not here to-night, I suppose?"

"I know," he answered, feelingly. "I heard when I arrived that she had been in the school-room all day, and I took the liberty of going to see her first, and—er—having a little chat with her."

"How kind of you!" her mother exclaimed.

Montacute bridled visibly.

"What was the subject of your improving conversation?" he asked.

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Mr. Jellybond, scenting an attack for which he was unprepared, blinked hard in search of a suitable reply. Miss Kingconstance came to the rescue with a remark.

"What good do you suppose is done by keeping Babs in all day?" she said.

"My dear Lorraine, she must be punished," Mrs. Kingconstance exclaimed. "You heard what she said. She's always saying dreadful things."

"She doesn't mean much—she's hot-tempered," said Montacute.

"But why should she be hot-tempered?" his mother asked. "*I* never was."

"You're different, mother," he replied. "Babs has queer notions, and she's always crossed when she mentions them, and that makes her fly out."

"But why should she have queer notions? *I* never had," Mrs. Kingconstance expostulated. "I don't think it at all nice for a girl to have queer notions, nor for anybody to have queer notions; do you, Mr. Jellybond?"

"Certainly not," he answered, emphatically, "and I think they should be got out of her head somehow, for they certainly make her quite—er—quite unbearable."

"You are criticising my sister somewhat freely, are you not, sir?" said Montacute, with deceptive evenness.

For the second time Mr. Jellybond Tinney was taken aback.

Miss Kingconstance smiled approval at her young nephew.

"I think myself the shutting-up is a mistake," she said, decidedly.

"But what am I to do?" Mrs. Kingconstance helplessly ejaculated, looking at Mr. Jellybond.

But that observant gentleman, warned by a gleam in Montacute's eye, ignored the appeal.

"Do you think I ought to have let her go out this

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afternoon?" Mrs. Kingconstance plaintively inquired. "It would have been better for her health, perhaps."

"Don't worry yourself about Babs, mamma," Julia said, laughing. "She always manages to have a good time. You may be sure she wouldn't stay in a moment longer than she felt inclined."

"Oh, but when I tell her!" Mrs. Kingconstance exclaimed. "She would never dare to disobey me."

"I don't know about disobey," said Julia. "Babs has a way of forgetting things that she doesn't want to remember. And I expect she forgot this afternoon."

"Why! Did she go out this afternoon?"

"Oh yes, and had great fun, Clodd told me," said Julia, casually. "She let all Farmer Horner's sheep into our wheat in Westbrook field."

"Oh, how wicked of her!" her mother cried. "She really must be punished for that, and severely too. Her conduct is perfectly outrageous. I must give up trying to manage her myself. She is quite beyond me. What do you think, Mr. Jellybond?"

"I pass the question on to Mr. Montacute," Mr. Jellybond answered, largely.

"I don't believe that story about the sheep," Montacute protested.

"Nor I," said Mr. Jellybond.

"Well, Clodd told me," said Julia, confidently.

"I dare say Babs hasn't been out of the school-room at all," her brother persisted. "She was there when I went out, and she was there just before dinner."

"We might send and see," Mrs. Kingconstance suggested.

"I saw her come in," Julia declared.

"Oh, ah, then that settles the question of her having been out," Mr. Jellybond observed, reflectively. "But as to the sheep story, I cannot believe it. Miss Lorraine is not wilfully destructive. Besides, now I come to

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think of it, Westbrook field is not down in wheat this year." He knew every inch of the property. "Oh, dear me, no; neither is it next to Farmer Horner's sheep-run. Why, let me see, it must be quite—yes—quite three fields away."

"So it is," said Mrs. Kingconstance, much relieved.

Julia turned crimson.

"What could Clodd mean by telling you such a story, Julia?" her mother said.

Julia looked sulky and confused, but would not answer.

"How did you come to be speaking to him at all?" her aunt asked her.

"I heard him tell Babs he had done something for her," she answered, "and I asked him what it was, and that was what he told me."

"Hoaxed you, in fact," said Montacute.

"I really must have this cleared up," Mrs. Kingconstance exclaimed, impatiently. "Go and fetch Babs, one of you, and let us ask her to explain."

"She'll tell the truth, at all events," said Montacute, rising with alacrity to obey.

That was what Mr. Jellybond feared. In spite of their compact he could not be sure of Babs, and if she were to come now and tell the whole story how would he be able to explain his own reticence?

"One moment, Montacute," he said, "before you disturb your sister—she was just going to bed when I left her. Why should we assume that she has been in mischief because she went out? I should think, probably, she only went to feed her pets—which, of course, she would be allowed to do."

"Of course," said Mrs. Kingconstance.

"Well, and she met Clodd, who told her that he had fed them for her."

"That's it, I'm sure," said Montacute. "And Julia

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began to question Clodd, and it amused him to hoax her."

"A most disrespectful thing to do," Mrs. Kingconstance exclaimed.

"He shall smart for it," Julia vowed.

"There is an old saying which seems to me apropos," Mr. Jellybond ventured. "Ask no questions and you'll have no—er—difficulties with the servants."

Miss Kingconstance yawned aggressively

CHAPTER XXI

ON his way home Mr. Jellybond had to pass the cottage in which Clodd Dulditch lived alone, now that his mother had gone out to service again. There was a light in the window, and it occurred to Mr. Jellybond that it would not be a bad thing to go in and have a talk with Clodd. Mr. Jellybond thought it would be just as well to know what had been going on that afternoon, in case of further complications, and he did not doubt but that Clodd could tell him. He tapped sharply at the door.

"Who's there?" was the surly response from within.

"Open the door, my good fellow," Mr. Jellybond answered, impressively.

"Oh, it's you, sir, is it?" said Clodd. "Come in and take a seat."

Mr. Jellybond held his head up so that he always seemed to be surveying the ceiling when he entered a room. This attitude gives an easy air of indifference to the most calculated move. It was therefore without apparent intention that he took the chair from which Clodd had just risen, at the little round table by the fire, and glanced casually at a paper on which Clodd had been making figures by the light of a tallow candle.

The cottage consisted of three rooms—the kitchen and the two bedrooms. The kitchen was panelled, sides and ceiling, with wood darkened by age. It looked cosy with cottage comfort in the flickering firelight. A settle stood on one side of the fireplace. The high man-

tel-piece was ornamented with the family china, which consisted of a shepherd and shepherdess, two yellow bulldogs with blue spots, and a castle with a lord on the door-step and a lady at the window. The dresser was covered with blue crockery, polished tins shone on the walls, and the sanded floor was of the brightest brick-red, in pleasant contrast to the yellow hearth. Everything was exceedingly neat and clean, and altogether there was that well-kept air about the whole place which is usually associated with the loving care of a woman. But it was Clodd himself who kept it so, and the fact seemed to indicate that he was not such a lout as was supposed.

"You have been busy, I see," said Mr. Jellybond, patronizingly, "busy improving your mind in a way which is extremely creditable to you—extremely creditable," he repeated, looking close at the paper on which Clodd appeared to have been making calculations.

Mr. Jellybond scanned the paper attentively for a minute or so. Clodd seated himself on the settle opposite and scanned Mr. Jellybond. Most people would have objected to this inquisition, but Clodd seemed rather to enjoy it. He watched Mr. Jellybond with a broad grin on his face as that gentleman laboriously deciphered some curious items, such as, "Yrly say 20—gents good for a fiver apiece at least—ladyes 2/6 xept No 1 whod be sure to stan lots—2 christmassings—5 errans—odd ones wen out with traps and informa-shuns 9."

Mr. Jellybond was puzzled.

"From what book did you get your propositions?" he asked at last, blandly.

"I don't rightly know the name o' the book," said Clodd.

Mr. Jellybond, glancing at the paper again, seemed suddenly to comprehend.

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"I beg your pardon, Clodd," he said, apologetically, "I see now. These are private accounts. What a misfortune it is to be near-sighted! I really thought you had been working a sum. Why did you let me think so?"

Clodd, looking hard at him, continued to grin, but said nothing.

"I see you're a man of few words, Mr. Clodd," Mr. Jellybond observed, genially. "Well, you are wise, for, as the poet says, 'Alas! we know not what we do when we speak words.'"

"The man as agrees to that's a fool," said Clodd.

"I'm afraid I must claim that distinction, then."

"No, not you," Clodd rejoined. "Every one knows that you're no fool. The man as doesn't know what 'is words is like to do's a fool—I ses it and I sticks to it. But that man doesn't call himself Jellybond Tinney."

Mr. Jellybond Tinney changed countenance, but he affected to laugh.

"Clodd, I believe you're a wit," he said, "although, if you are, your countenance does not betray you. Wit, Clodd, is a valuable possession. Now"—this confidentially—"I don't mind telling you I never was witty."

"Maybe," said Clodd. "But I'll take my dick you allus had your wits about you."

An uneasy feeling began to take possession of Mr. Jellybond. There was more than mere boorishness in the assured familiarity of Clodd's manner; upon what was he presuming? Mr. Jellybond determined to get to business at once in the hope of finding out by the way.

"It was very good of you," he began, without further circumlocution—"it was very good of you to make all smooth for Miss Lorraine to-day, Clodd—very good, indeed. She might have got into serious trouble, you know, but for you—eh?"

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The grin which had been fixed on Clodd's face from the moment Mr. Jellybond entered suddenly vanished, and was succeeded by a gravely inquiring expression. His eyes opened unexpectedly wide, his mouth contracted, and Clodd stood confessed by no means such a bad-looking fellow as people who saw him only with his habitual half-idiotic smile on his face were apt to suppose. But, beyond the unexpected change of countenance, Clodd made no sign, neither did he say anything.

Mr. Jellybond waited a moment, then tried again.

"And the fowls, Clodd," he said, benignly—"don't you think it was a pity?"

"Which, sir?" said Clodd, recovering his grin.

"Why—"

Mr. Jellybond hesitated. If Clodd knew nothing about the fowls, he reflected, it would be a mistake to tell him. On the other hand, how was Mr. Jellybond to find out what he wanted to know without betraying what he knew already? They might go on fencing about the subject for the rest of the night and get no further. Mr. Jellybond began to feel provoked. He was determined, however, not to be baffled by a clown like Clodd.

"I came to ask you," he said, speaking authoritatively, "what you meant by the lie you told Miss Julia this evening?"

"Whew-w-w!" whistled Clodd, more at his ease than ever. "So that's your little game, is it? I thought you were up to somethin'. I know'd as yer 'fectionate interest in us was too sweet ter be wholesome. Well, you'll not get nothin' out o' me, you may take yer dick o' that."

"How dare you speak to me like that, sir?" Mr. Jellybond exclaimed, rising wrathfully.

"'Ow dare you come a-pumpin' o' me, sir?" Clodd rejoined, mimicking his tone impudently.

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"Look here now, Clodd," Mr. Jellybond said, after a moment's reflection, "it's no good losing your temper."

"Never felt less like it i' my life, sir," said Clodd, with a grin which fully corroborated the statement.

There was a pause, during which Mr. Jellybond returned to his grand manner.

"I had better tell you at once," he said, slowly, "that I have come to obtain a full explanation from you of what happened this afternoon."

"I'll be hanged if I'll split on Miss Babs," Clodd answered, doggedly.

"You are quite right, my good fellow," Mr. Jellybond blandly assured him. "Loyalty is the most noble of qualities. Never betray a friend; but draw a distinction between friends and enemies. Now I am a friend of Miss Lorraine's, and I come to question for myself, because I am just as anxious to save her from getting into trouble as you are. If you will tell me the exact truth, then I shall know how much of it should be used to screen the young lady. Everybody knows she was up to something this afternoon, and," he added, confidentially, "I know pretty well what; so if you want to save her you had better be honest with me."

Clodd stroked his chin and stared at Mr. Jellybond thoughtfully.

"An' why shouldn't I tell jest what's enough myself?" he said, at last. "They say as three can't keep a secret."

"Now look here, Mr. Clodd," Mr. Jellybond said, sternly, "I'll have no nonsense. I'll give you gold if you tell me the truth, and I'll give you a licking if you don't."

"Will yew, sir?" said Clodd, defiantly. "An' if ye gie me a lickin', I'll hev yew up fur assault, an' if yew kill me, yew'll swing fur it—an' 'ow'll that be fur yer schemes?"

"Who'd take your word against mine, I'd like to know, you lout?"

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"There's plenty as 'ud think ill o' yew wi' pleasure," said Clodd ; " an' yew might as well 'ang a dog at once as give 'im a bad name, yew may 'ave 'eard. You're mighty clever, Mr. Jellybond, but I'm a match fur yew. Yew likes to worm yerself into folks' affairs, but I'm desh'd if yew gets a 'old ower Miss Lorraine through me. I'll not tell nothin', an' wot's more," he added, edging up to Mr. Jellybond with both fists clinched, " yew'll pay me to 'old my tongue before yew leave this 'ouse."

" You'll lose your place for this !" said Mr. Jellybond, wrathfully.

" An' if I do, I can get another," said Clodd ; " but if I do, yew'll lose yer repetation, and yew'll not get another."

" What do you mean ?" Mr. Jellybond demanded.

" Jest what I ses," rejoined Clodd, and added something in an undertone which caused Mr. Jellybond's dignity to collapse visibly.

" But where are your proofs ?" he asked, in an altered voice.

" My proofs are wot yew call livin' witnesses," said Clodd—" Jim Townly, Jessie Horner, and old Patty Groves. They was all in t' next parish less nor a 'undred years ago."

" Where are they now ?"

" Lunnon. They doesn't know where yew are, though, an' they won't unless I split. Now I don't want to split, cause I likes to turn a honest penny, an' so, if you'll do summat fur me, I'll do summat fur yew."

" Blackmail, eh ?" said Mr. Jellybond.

Clodd blinked at him.

" I don't know about that," he said ; " but it's ten pun to-night, an' a rekermendation to learn the business o' footman i' the missus's establishment to-morrow. I's yer 'ousekeeper's only son, yew know," Clodd added, with

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a wink, "an' she's a 'onest woman, an' I'm a tolerable lad—a bit rough now, maybe, but the kind o' stone as 'll take a polish."

"Does she know?" Mr. Jellybond asked.

"Who? Mother? Not she! She wouldn't keep it to 'erself if *she* knowed. Mother's a bad business woman."

"And if I pay you and give you the recommendation," Jellybond bargained, "will you hold your tongue?"

"Yes. I'll swear to that so long as yer civil to me. But I'll stan' no puttin' upon, so I gives yew fair warnin'."

Mr. Jellybond put the two five-pound notes down on the table, but kept his hand on them.

"It is a bargain, then," he said. "You will not trouble me for more?"

"Done with yew upon oath," Clodd replied, stretching his hand out for the money.

"Oh, by-the-by, one thing more. You can tell me this," Mr. Jellybond exclaimed: "Does Miss Lorraine know anything?"

"That's not included," said Clodd, astutely. "I'll tell you that for another sovereign."

Mr. Jellybond put the money down on the table with a clink.

"Now," he said, irritably, "what does she know?"

Clodd snatched the money and pocketed it.

"She doan't know nothin'," he said, deliberately, "an' wot's more, she don't suspect nothin', else she'd find out soon enough, fur she's a sharp 'un," he added, admiringly; "an' that's the truth fur yew, sir."

Mr. Jellybond crushed his hat down on his head but said nothing. Clodd opened the door for him respectfully and wished him a pleasant walk home.

Mr. Jellybond departed with at least one doubt resolved. It was evident that Clodd the wary was by no means the fool he chose to appear.

CHAPTER XXII

THERE is this about Mr. Jellybond Tinney which it is always pleasant to contemplate—he did enjoy himself. “Enjoy as you go along,” he was continually saying: “enjoy the little things.” The worst of it was that in his own case the little things were beginning to absorb his attention to the exclusion of all else. So far he had been an eminently successful man, just because he had kept his main object always in view and allowed no minor matters to interest him for more than a moment. Now all his interests were in minor matters, and the great purpose which had brought him to Danehurst, the finishing touch which he had intended to put to his career to crown it, was being insensibly postponed. His purpose had been to marry and to go into Parliament; and that was his purpose still; but he no longer pursued it steadily. At first he had thought to carry it out with as little delay as possible, as had been his habit with other purposes of his life; now he was beginning to think that “some day” would be soon enough. He was becoming more like the only half-successful man who starts in life well equipped, but discounts his chances by expending his energy on many things because he finds he can do them well, instead of concentrating all his strength upon the one which he would, in that case, have done to perfection. It was not the things to which he had been accustomed all his life that betrayed him; it was his new experiences—the society of ladies, for one thing.

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He was becoming more accustomed to it now ; but at first it had intoxicated him to be with gentlewomen ; and he had not been able to settle down steadily to the pursuit of one for desire of them all. Then there was novel-reading. He had read a novel for the first time after he came to Danehurst, and had found it so entrancing that soon his days began and ended with a novel, although there were more serious studies which it was urgently necessary that he should pursue if he would succeed.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney had no worries, for the very simple reason that he would not worry himself. He let nothing disturb him for more than a moment. That Clodd should know whence he came had been a shock ; but he had recovered himself before he reached home. Clodd had so evidently an eye to his own interests, and they would be served so much the best by holding his tongue, that Mr. Jellybond saw no danger from that quarter. On the contrary, Clodd might be made useful now in a way that would have been impossible had he not been guilty of blackmailing. Mr. Jellybond, therefore, dismissed him from his mind when he reached home, lit a cigar, poured himself out a bumper of burgundy, stretched himself on a couch, and took up his book. It was *Vanity Fair*, and when he had read some time he reflected : " It's really best to be quite straight—the straighter the better ; that's always been my principle, and if it hasn't always been my practice, Fate was at fault."

The sunny morning found him alert and cheery, with his mind intent upon a host of what he called " little duties "—enough to fill up his day. There was Miss Spice, to begin with. Mr. Jellybond had dismissed from his mind all knowledge of the serenade. All he knew now was that he had heard that Miss Spice was ill, and he was going, as was right and proper, to ask after

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her. He went with a book under his arm, and a basket of good things, carefully covered with flowers, in his hand. Poor little Ally Spice ! He was really quite concerned about her.

Miss Spice was down in the drawing-room that morning, lying on the couch. Fanny Sturdy and Florence Japp had dropped in casually to see how she was. They were both curious to know what had upset her. Something had been said about a shock to the system ; but what shock to the system was possible in her way of life ? They associated shocks to the system with important people.

" I am sure I wish *I* could have a shock to my system," said Florence Japp, with a discontented frown, " or anything else for a change."

She took her lot in life tragically ; Fanny Sturdy was dreamy and apathetic.

" Ah, little you know !" said Miss Spice—" little you know ! *I* used to think that a change would be for the better, especially a change of ideas ; but now—now"—she shook her head expressively and sighed—" now I would give the world to go back to the days when I thought so."

" But what happened to you, Ally ?" Florence asked.

" That no one will ever know," said Miss Spice. " All I can say is that I dreamt a dream, and I had a rude awakening. Life will never be the same to me any more. It is not that my hopes were vain—that would not have pained me so much. It is the shattering of my ideal which has overwhelmed me."

" Something gone wrong in London, I suppose," said Florence Japp, after casting about in her mind vainly for somebody in Danehurst who was likely to have been Miss Spice's ideal. " You have a lot of friends in London, haven't you ? I wish *I* had. I should like to live in London and see the shops every day. There's al-

ways something to do there—something to look forward to.”

“Ah !” said Fanny Sturdy, “one would have a chance there ; one would feel alive.”

They sat in silence for some time, all three with their eyes fixed on the long road that ran south—the long, straight road by which no one interesting ever came. Fanny Sturdy was sitting near the window, so that she could see down the road to the right as well—the road that led to the village.

“Here’s Mr. Jellybond,” she said, presently, in an indifferent tone.

Florence Japp’s eyes dilated ; Miss Spice became rigid.

“Not coming here ?” she managed to articulate.

But even as she spoke, the big, bland man with the unsmiling mouth stopped at the little gate.

“I’ll let him in,” said Florence Japp, jumping up excitedly and going out into the hall. She shut the door carefully after her, so that nothing but a murmur of voices could be heard in the drawing-room. After a considerable delay she returned, looking radiant.

“Mr. Jellybond Tinney !” she announced, playfully.

Miss Spice was paralyzed.

He came in as on any ordinary occasion, carrying the book and the basket.

“How are you, Miss Fanny ?” he said, by-the-way, “And our dear Miss Ally ? Really poorly, I see. Well, so I was told ; but I hoped—I hoped the bearer of the bad news exaggerated. However, I hurried here at once, as soon as I heard, to ascertain the truth for myself, and I ventured to bring this basket, with a few flowers and a book. For I thought if perchance I found you alone—which was not likely, for Danehurst knows that good people are scarce and looks after them—eh, Miss Florence ?—I brought the book, thinking you might like me to read to you, if you were disinclined to talk.”

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He had taken Miss Spice's hot little hand and held it in his while he was speaking. He knew the effect of his firm, cool touch upon her, and watched it working. Indignation and anger were in her face when he entered, but were fast succeeded by dumb reproach, then by uncertainty. Could she have been mistaken? She must have been mistaken. He did think it was "cats." It was evident that he had not even suspected her.

Miss Spice experienced a delicious revulsion of feeling. Had they been alone together she must have thrown herself into the dear man's arms; as it was, her pent-up emotion found vent in tears. Mr. Jellybond saw them coming, and skilfully placed himself between her and the other ladies, so that she was able to wipe her eyes unobserved. When she had sufficiently recovered herself he proceeded to make the conversation general.

"And how does the work prosper, Miss Fanny?" he asked. "I always wish we men could do fancy-work! It must be such a solace to see those lovely things shape themselves under your skilful fingers!"

"When one hasn't too much of it," Fanny sighed.

"But what's the good of those things when they're done?" said Florence. "I can't be bothered with such useless work."

"Oh, not useless!" he remonstrated. "Nothing that beautifies life can be called useless."

"May I give—will you accept—that chair-back when it is finished?" Fanny Sturdy stammered, diffidently.

"You are *too* kind," Mr. Jellybond exclaimed. "Is she not, Miss Ally?"

Miss Spice, from her sofa, smiled on them all impartially; but, oh! how she did wish that her dear lady friends would go and leave him to her. Fortunately for her comfort, however, she supposed that that also was his desire. Not the shadow of a doubt of the dear man remained in her innocent bosom.

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"It is such a lovely morning," Mr. Jellybond remarked, "you ought really to have your windows wide open. Will you allow me? There will be no draught. It is draughts that are dangerous."

He opened the window wide, and little Miss Spice heaved a deep sigh of satisfaction as the sweet air flooded the room.

"Does that long road to the south make you think of anything, Miss Florence?" Mr. Jellybond asked.

Florence looked vaguely down the road and then inquiringly at Mr. Jellybond. He tapped the book he had brought with him.

"It is here—I read it only this morning," he said. "Tennyson, you know—'Fatima':

" 'I look'd athwart the burning drouth
Of that long desert to the south.' "

All eyes were directed towards the window, and seriousness settled upon them, as if something sacred had been said.

"Tennyson is a revelation to me," he ejaculated. "But I perceive a difference between you three young ladies and—er—Fatima. Her knight—er—had come and gone apparently; but yours is still to come! Lucky girls, with life before you! Make the most of it. A bird in the hand—er—sings better than two in the bush."

"How do you explain that?" said Miss Spice, always ready to be instructed.

"Well—er—in the usual way," he answered. "It is the things we have not got which hold out to us all the promise of pleasure in life, so we imagine; but that is the mistake we make. Life, when we view it aright, is all pleasure and all promise and all present interest. Just consider how strange it is. What odd things happen! And how odd the things are that do not happen! Have you ever reflected upon that? Just think, for in-

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stance, how seldom any one ever falls out of bed. Now there is a bed, a certain height from the ground, with unprotected sides—except in the case of infants—and absolutely nothing to keep us from falling out every night of our lives; yet just think how seldom that accident happens! Why do we not fall out of bed? That is the question—why do we not find ourselves sitting on the floor every night of our lives? What law prevents it? Oh yes, life is full of such problems—full of fresh interests—if only we tried to find them.”

Mr. Worringham came in at the gate at that moment, and seeing Florence Japp at the window, addressed her.

“I hear Miss Ally has been ill,” he said; “but I hope it is not true.”

“Miss Ally is on the mend,” Mr. Jellybond responded for her with elephantine playfulness. “Come in and help the cure.”

“I am sorry I cannot come in, thank you,” Mr. Worringham answered, coming up to the window. “I am on my way to lunch at Dane Court.”

“If you will wait a moment,” said Mr. Jellybond, “I will accompany you. I have to see Mrs. Kingconstance on—er—a matter of business. Ladies, I must leave you to extract the moral of the moment.”

“I see no moral in the moment,” said Florence Japp, bitterly. She was suspicious of this business with Mrs. Kingconstance.

“You can extract a moral from everything, dear young lady,” Mr. Jellybond assured her in didactic measure, “as you can extract the sting from a bee—er—by adding something to the end of it.” He blinked several times after this pronouncement. “But avoid the obvious—look always for the out-of-the-way,” he added. “Eh, Mr. Worringham, don’t you agree?”

“Er—no, I do not,” said the gentle vicar. “I say give us the familiar, the reposeful commonplace, the obvious,

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to inspire in us that sense of security upon which our peace depends."

"How nice it is to hear you talking!" said Fanny Sturdy, admiringly. "I wish I could always live with superior people."

"Superior people!" Mr. Jellybond ejaculated. "My dear young lady, I assure you that nobody is better than anybody, and everything is all the same. Miss Ally, reflect upon that. Nobody is better than anybody, and everything is all the same."

The two gentlemen walked on together awhile in silence. Mr. Jellybond was smiling to himself, as at some happy reminiscence. Mr. Worryingham seemed to be cogitating.

They presented a singular contrast—the gentle, ascetic-looking vicar, well born, well bred, with self-denial evident in his countenance and stamped upon his shabby clothes, and Mr. Jellybond Tinney, the successful man of no breeding but some acquired taste, well fed, well dressed, capable, affluent—a man of mark, to judge by his assurance, in some walk of life or other. But they were excellent friends. The vicar believed in Mr. Jellybond Tinney; he felt the power of the man and admired him, and such eccentricities as he observed in Mr. Jellybond's manner or conversation he set down to something in the nature of a sense of humor with which he himself had not been endowed. Mr. Jellybond had often made him laugh on quite unseemly subjects, but in such a natural way that Mr. Worryingham would have felt it hypercritical, if not uncharitable, to have objected. For the first time in his life he was treated like a man of the world, and found in the position much pleasant diversion.

"You seem to have a cheering effect upon all my female parishioners," he said, at last.

"Well, I hope I have, rather," Mr. Jellybond answered,

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modestly. "I sympathize with them so! Just think what their lives are! What have they to look forward to? Scarcely a woman in the parish has a chance of ever having a husband and a home of her own—and as to a career—" He spread out his hands at the impossibility.

"Is that why you flirt with them all impartially?" said the vicar, slyly.

"I? Flirt? Oh, come now! Well, perhaps I do a little—once in a way. It is only kind; it does them good. It means so much to them, you see, poor dears—takes them out of themselves—gives them a little fillip, don't you know."

"Besides being an innocent pleasure to you, eh?"

"Well—er—what shall I say?"

Mr. Jellybond stepped out buoyantly; the vicar also showed signs of exhilaration. He had become almost playful himself since Mr. Jellybond came into his life, and was in consequence amiably disposed towards all the diversions of that gentleman.

CHAPTER XXIII

AS the gentlemen approached Dane Court, Mr. Jellybond Tinney became preoccupied. He glanced about him alertly, as was his wont, especially after they entered the drive ; but his mind was not intent upon the affluence made visible in the excellent order of the place, nor upon the heavy summer foliage of the giant trees, although he looked up at it as they passed beneath, nor upon the white clouds which floated across the brilliant blue, nor upon the birds that skimmed across his field of vision. He was thinking seriously of another matter.

"Has it ever been considered likely," he said, at last, "that Mrs. Kingconstance would marry again?"

"I—er—really cannot say," Mr. Worringham answered. "It had not occurred to me, personally, that she might."

"That is strange," said Mr. Jellybond. "The widow is comely."

"But—er," Mr. Worringham objected, "there are so many spinsters in the neighborhood."

"You think it unfair, perhaps, for one woman to have two husbands while there are spinsters who have not secured even one?"

"Well—er—that was not quite what I had in my mind; but, now that you mention it, I am inclined to agree."

"Have you ever thought about the best way to approach a widow on the subject of matrimony?" Mr. Jellybond asked.

"Er—no," said Mr. Worringham. "Is there—er—do



"A CURIOUS CHANGE PASSED OVER MR. JELLYBOND TINNEY"

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you not—er—in a word, what difference would you make in the case of a widow ?”

“ Well, from observation I gather that to win a spinster is one thing, but to win a widow is quite another,” Mr. Jellybond assured him, confidentially. “ To win a spinster you must make her understand that you cannot live without her ; but to win a widow you must make her feel that she cannot live without you. Without caring a rap for you as a man, she may dote upon you as an addition to her comfort.”

“ Indeed !” said Mr. Worringham, much impressed.

The thud of a horse’s hoofs on the turf behind them caused them both to look round.

“ Cadenhouse !” Mr. Worringham ejaculated.

A curious change passed over Mr. Jellybond Tinney. It was as if his whole person had stiffened into an expression of suspense. The horseman pulled up and dismounted when he came abreast of them. He greeted Mr. Worringham, then glanced casually at Mr. Jellybond, whom he had not met before. The vicar introduced them.

“ I am glad to have the pleasure of meeting Lord Cadenhouse at last,” said Mr. Jellybond Tinney.

“ Have you been some time in the neighborhood then ?” Cadenhouse asked.

“ It was Mr. Jellybond Tinney who bought the Swiss Cottage,” Mr. Worringham interposed.

“ Oh, really,” said Cadenhouse, on whom the information made no impression whatever, so little did anything that happened in the neighborhood interest him in those days. But his polite affectation of interest, which conveyed the most perfect indifference, instead of offending Mr. Jellybond Tinney, seemed to have the effect of setting him at ease again. The tension of his attitude relaxed, and, although he continued watchful, he ceased to be anxious.

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All three walked on together, Cadenhouse leading his horse. The long façade of the house lay before them, whitening in the sunshine. The stiff flower-beds of the sunken Italian garden glowed with color. A statue here and there in the distance gleamed white against the dark brightness of the evergreen shrubs. Mrs. Kingconstance had done her worst with gray stucco and debased ornamentation to make the house rococo, and although the stately line of the old Elizabethan mansion held its own against the degradation, no one of taste could see it and not sigh for the quiet richness of the deep red brick, mellowed by age, which had been its original boast.

At one end of the terrace bright-colored parasols proclaimed the presence of ladies. Mrs. Kingconstance and her sister-in-law were seated there idling, with books on their laps, in which apparently they took no interest. The gentlemen joined them, and instantly all was animation.

Clodd had appeared opportunely to lead away Cadenhouse's horse ; but, having done so, he returned. He had seen Mr. Jellybond coming, and, thinking only his own important business could have brought him to the house, he stationed himself conspicuously at a little distance in an awkward attitude, and waited to be summoned. He had been hovering about all the morning, specially well dressed, with a view to making his application for promotion in person, but had not the courage to approach the presence unsupported.

"How ridiculous Clodd looks standing there!" said Miss Kingconstance. "What does he think he's doing?"

"What do you want, Clodd?" Mrs. Kingconstance asked, apathetically.

Clodd came forward, doffed his cap, and looked at Mr. Jellybond Tinney; but that gentleman, taken unawares by his ill-timed arrival on the scene, could think of no way to account for it.



“ ‘ I SEED MISS LORRAINE A-COMIN’ OOP T’ DRIVE ’ ”

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"What do you want—er—my good lad?" he asked.

Clodd, holding his cap in both hands, and every now and then giving it a twirl in his nervousness, looked hard at him.

"The place," he jerked out, with a gasp.

"By-the-way, Clodd," Mrs. Kingconstance exclaimed, suddenly rousing herself, "will you be good enough to explain what you meant by telling Miss Julia that impertinent falsehood yesterday evening, and what you were talking to Miss Lorraine about at the window? What had you been doing for Miss Lorraine? Now, don't tell *me* any preposterous stories."

Great drops of perspiration stood on the culprit's forehead. He twirled his cap and appealed with a look to Mr. Jellybond Tinney; but that gentleman was severely neutral.

"Well?" said Mrs. Kingconstance, impatiently.

Cadenhouse would have retired; but Miss Kingconstance playfully barred the way with her parasol.

"There's something interesting coming," she whispered. "Do wait and hear."

Mr. Worringham sat with his hands crossed on the top of his stick, absently blinking at the scene.

"Well, m'm," Clodd stammered at last, scraping his foot on the ground, "I'm very sorry, m'm. I wouldn't 'a' told Miss Julia no lies if she 'edn't 'a' asked no questions, on'y she come a-sneakin' and a-listenin' at the window—"

Mrs. Kingconstance stopped him with a gesture.

"Remember of whom you are speaking, sir!" she exclaimed.

Clodd looked at her stupidly with his mouth open, and then turned to Mr. Jellybond Tinney.

"Innocent of offence!" that gentleman ejaculated. "It is his way of expressing himself. These gentry can only tell their stories in their own way."

"Pray let him go on in his own way," said Miss Kingconstance, languidly. "It promises to be unique."

"Go on, then," said Mrs. Kingconstance, resigning herself to the clownish simplicity of Clodd.

"A-sneakin' and a-listenin' at the window," he repeated, doggedly, "to wot I was a-sayin' to Miss Lorraine; but bein' as she was round t' corner, she only 'eard enough to mak' 'er cu'yous, an' she ses to me, 'Clodd,' she ses, w'en Miss Lorraine 'ad gone, 'I'll gi'e yew tew 'arf-soverins,' she ses, 'to tell me wot yer've bin a-doin' fur Lorraine,' ses she." Here Clodd gave his hat a twirl and looked at the group, as who should say: "That's iniquity for you, if you like!" "I tol' 'er it wer'n't nawthin' in pertic'lar," he stolidly pursued, "but she wouldn't believe that, an' she stretched out 'er 'and in the dark, an' she ses: 'Clodd,' ses she, ''ere's the tew 'arf-soverins,' she ses, 'now tell us,' she ses; 'and wotever yew do, don't come fur to go fur to tell me no lies, else yew'll be 'ad oop afore me ma, an' then yew'll catch it, won't yew, oh, no!'" Clodd gave his cap a twirl by way of punctuation. "Well, m'm," he continued, "I tried 'ard to convince 'er it wasn't nawthin'; but she'd got it into 'er 'ead contrariwise, an' nowt wouldn't convince 'er she was wrong, so I jest tol' 'er summat to git rid uf 'er—an' that summat were so werry ridic'lous," Clodd concluded with a grin, "that if Miss Julia 'adn't 'a' bin in sech a 'urry to b'lieve anythink, she'd 'a' knawed i' 'arf a min'et as 'twas lies."

"How *wicked* of you!" Mrs. Kingconstance cried.

"Beg pardon, m'm," said Clodd, with a scrape of his foot. "It were tew sixpences," he added, "as Miss Julia passed off on us i' the dark fur tew 'arf-soverins."

"That must be another fabrication, I am sure," said Mrs. Kingconstance, appealing to them all. "Julia never could have done such a thing."

"Except by mistake," Mr. Jellybond qualified.

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"Doubtless a mistake," said Miss Kingconstance, slowly, with equivocal emphasis, leaning back in her chair and looking up at the sky.

"But what were you talking to Miss Lorraine about?" Mrs. Kingconstance demanded. "You have not told us that yet; and you had something mysterious to say to her which you wanted to keep secret."

Clodd looked at her, then looked at the ground stupidly, and twirled his cap.

"Well?" said Mrs. Kingconstance, impatiently. "I'm waiting."

Clodd shuffled his feet and twirled his cap in an ecstasy of nervousness.

"Well, m'm," he began, "Miss Lorraine's very pertic'lar about her garding, an' I hes to 'elp 'er wi' it, an' she tol' me to get it tidyed oop fur t' beddin'-out plants which did oughter 'a' bin put in las' week. That wer' three days ago. But I's not much on a gardiner, m'm, though smart enough at in-door work"—he looked at Mr. Jellybond—"an' I clean forgot; an' Miss Lorraine called me fur everythink w'en she went an' found 'em bulbs still in. But she's a rare un, m'm, Miss Lorraine is, an' any one on us 'ud do anythink to please 'er; an' I felt more mad because I'd forgot t' garden than I felt riled at bein' called fur it."

"A very proper sentiment," Mr. Jellybond murmured.

Mrs. Kingconstance smiled agreement.

"So I cleaned oop in a 'urry yestiddy afternoon," Clodd, thus encouraged, continued with slow emphasis, "an' as luck would 'av' it, I see Miss Lorraine a-comin' in jest as I were goin' 'ome, an' I made so bold as to arsk to speak to 'er, fur I wanted ter let 'er know as I were sorry fur my furget, an' I thowt she'd be pleased b'cos as I done wot I could ter—ter—"

"Atone for it," Mr. Jellybond suggested, with approbation. "You felt you had been in the wrong, and hav-

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ing made what reparation you could, you wished to be forgiven. Quite the right feeling—quite the right feeling, indeed.”

“Quite the right feeling,” Mrs. Kingconstance echoed.

These soft plaudits were sweet to Clodd, but they threatened to be his undoing, for the moment he felt his audience with him he began to lose his head.

“As I sed afore, m’m,” he plunged on, “I seed Miss Lorraine a-comin’ oop t’ drive wi’ ’er shoes an’ stockin’s i’ ’er ’and—”

Everybody sat up suddenly.

“With *what* in her hand?” Mrs. Kingconstance exclaimed.

Clodd clapped his hand on his mouth, a gesture which, under the circumstances, highly resembled the proverbial late locking of the stable door.

“He said, ‘with her shoes and stockings in her hand,’ ” Miss Kingconstance observed, with a suppressed smile.

Clodd assented. He saw that there was no help for it.

“Do you mean to say that Miss Lorraine Kingconstance had nothing on her feet?” her mother demanded.

“I didn’t look fur to see, m’m,” Clodd answered, discreetly.

“You said she had her shoes and stockings in her hand?”

“Yes, m’m.”

“Do you think,” said Mrs. Kingconstance, turning to them all imploringly—“do you think that a daughter of mine *could* have been walking about barefooted?”

No one ventured to deny it.

“Where is Lorraine?” her mother asked, in a despairing voice.

“Would it not be just as well to conclude the examination of Clodd?” Mr. Jellybond ventured to suggest.

“Have you anything more to tell?” Mrs. Kingconstance snapped, impatiently.

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"No, m'm," said Clodd.

"Then you can go."

Clodd awaited no second bidding.

"Now, what is to be done?" said Mrs. Kingconstance.

But before any one could reply the first rumble of the great gong in the hall was heard, and as the velvet tones, swelling in volume, rolled out *crescendo*, Mrs. Kingconstance's perturbation subsided. There was lobster mayonnaise for luncheon. She rose with a sigh of relief.

"Let us go in," she said.

Mr. Jellybond offered her his arm.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT was the old story. One person goes in to eat lobster mayonnaise, while another goes out to weep bitterly. Clodd knew he had made a mess of it, and fled from the spot headlong, as if by haste he could escape from his own indiscretion.

"Oh, desh it !" he exclaimed, stopping short in a shady alley, and bringing down a clinched fist on one side. "Oh, deng it !" he cried, bringing down the other fist on the other side, and making a bow of his back. "Oh, wot a fule I's bin, to be sure !" he groaned, raising both fists and bringing them down together.

Babs, coming up behind him from under the trees, was in time to witness this performance.

"Have you lost anything, Clodd ?" she said.

Clodd turned to her with a distorted countenance.

"Miss Lorraine," he whimpered, "I's as good as split on you."

"Well, and after that ?" said Babs, eying him contemptuously.

Clodd shook both his clinched fists at the landscape in despair of the whole position.

"Not but what yew can square it," he said, suddenly, pulling himself together and becoming confidential.

"Mr. Jellybond Tinney, 'e's squared it fur Miss Julia."

"What had Miss Julia been doing ?"

"She made b'lieve in the dark as two sixpences was two 'arf-soverins."

"Clever of her," said Babs, laconically.

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"But Mr. Jellybond 'e said of course it were by mistake she done it."

"Clever of him," said Babs. "But how did *I* come in?"

"They'll be a-wantin' of yew to arsk if yew was walkin' out yestiddy barefoot," Clodd answered, evasively. "If yer ma 'ears as yew did, she'll think worse on yew nor if yew'd set t' house afire. I didn't split intentional," he added, in eager self-justification; "but I got sorter confused like, an' let out as 'ow I'd seed yew wi' yer shoes and stockings i' yewr 'and. But I tol' 'em I didn't look to see if yew'd none on yer feet as well, thinkin' likely yew'd 'ave more nor one pair; so yew've got the cue, miss."

"Thank you," said Babs, dryly.

On the way in she lingered, looking up at the house intently, as if she were asking some question of it. In the hall she encountered the butler.

"I say, Benson, what's the pet dish for luncheon to-day?" she asked.

"Lobster mayonnaise, miss."

"And champagne?"

"Yes, miss."

Babs threw up her hat. It descended on Benson's head. His dignity was marred for a moment by a twinkle in his eye. He knew as well as Babs did that she would have no occasion to be afraid of her mother's severity once it was tempered by lobster salad and champagne.

"Have they been round yet?" she said, turning back to ask the question.

"They are being partaken of just at this moment, miss."

Babs glanced at the clock.

"They'll take a few minutes to act," she remarked.

"I might as well make myself tidy."

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She ran up-stairs, and a little later burst into the dining-room with her usual impetuosity. Seeing Cadenhouse, she stopped short, her face lighted up, the delicate shell-pink of her cheeks deepened, and a smile of irrepressible gladness enhanced the charm of her eyes and mouth.

When the greetings were over, Babs stood a moment reflecting. Cadenhouse was seated at her mother's right, with Miss Kingconstance beside him.

"Oh, dear, I don't know where to sit," said Babs. "I want to be beside Cadenhouse, and opposite to him as well—beside him to talk to him, and opposite to him to see him. Perhaps opposite to him's the best," she pursued. "Mr. Jellybond, move up a little higher, like a good soul."

Mr. Jellybond complied effusively.

"Really, Babs!" Mrs. Kingconstance remonstrated.

"It's all right, mamma," said Babs, with a smile. "How about that mayonnaise?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Kingconstance, addressing herself to the subject with the serious interest she felt in it, nicely tempered by the becoming modesty of a hostess, "it was really rather nice."

"Excellent," Mr. Jellybond ejaculated.

Babs looked round.

"Where's dear Julia?" she asked.

"You know, dear," her mother answered, "she's gone to lunch with Meg Normanton."

"What a bother!" said Babs. "I like to have the whole family and half the neighborhood here on these occasions. But never mind. Fire away."

"What *do* you mean, Babs?" her mother asked.

"The row, of course," said Babs, noiselessly clapping her little hands, an habitual gesture. "Aren't we going to have a row?" she added, with a disappointed air.

They all tried not to smile, but with indifferent suc-

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cess. Benson deftly refilled the champagne glasses. Mrs. Kingconstance sipped, and looked from Mr. Jellybond to Cadenhouse for inspiration, then sipped again.

"Now, don't you be asking any one's advice, mamma," Babs warned her. "Remember your promise. This is our game. The others may look on and applaud if they like; but they mustn't interfere. It's you to play."

"Babs," said Mrs. Kingconstance, attempting to be severe, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I'll try," said Babs.

Cadenhouse's countenance relaxed.

"One to me," said Babs. "It's your turn again, mamma."

"But really, Babs," said Mrs. Kingconstance, with quivering lips, "this is very serious—this—this story."

"If it be true," Mr. Jellybond put in, piously.

"Clodd says he saw you with your shoes and stockings in your hand. What have you to say to that?"

"Well," said Babs, deliberately, "I confess it isn't the usual place for them; but I had my reasons."

"Oh, dear!" Mrs. Kingconstance exclaimed. "It is true, then? You *were* walking barefooted? What *could* make you do such a thing?"

"Don't be shocked, mamma," Babs pleaded. "There's plenty of precedent for walking barefooted. There's holy writ, isn't there, Mr. Worringham? Lots of people did it in days of yore. It was quite the thing at one time to burnish your soul by bruising your feet."

"Really, Babs, how could you?" Mrs. Kingconstance helplessly ejaculated.

Then there was a pause.

"Trial over?" said Babs, at last. "Culprit pleads guilty. You can defer sentence or pronounce it at once, as you like; or you can, being a good, kind, generous, *dear* mamma, grant a free pardon in honor of the occa-

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sion. I'll put it to the vote. Those who are for a free pardon hold up their hands."

Everybody held up a hand except Mr. Jellybond Tinney, who in his enthusiasm held up two.

"Carried unanimously," he said, amidst a burst of hilarity in which Mrs. Kingconstance joined in spite of herself.

"That's my game, I think," said Babs. "And now for food."

CHAPTER XXV

AFTER luncheon Babs wanted to take possession of Cadenhouse. He was standing in a window talking to Miss Kingconstance, and Babs joined them there.

"Babs," said her aunt, "you're a dreadful child!"

Babs owned to it unaffectedly.

"And the worst of it is, auntie," she said, "I'm not child enough to be so dreadful. I am growing up. I have bursts of young-ladylike feeling that distress me."

"But why don't you make up your mind to be a young lady at once?" said Cadenhouse.

"Would you love me if I did?" Babs asked, wistfully.

Miss Kingconstance and Cadenhouse exchanged smiling glances.

"We do love you, Babs," Cadenhouse assured her.

"Oh, yes, of course, I know," Babs answered, impatiently. "But that is not what I mean, and you know it is not. You know that I want you to love me—*me*—and only me. Why don't you?"

Cadenhouse looked at her benignly.

"You're younger than you think you are, Babs," he said.

"When you look down upon me from that height, I am old and seared and gray," she answered, bitterly, "because you despise me."

"I despise you?" he exclaimed.

"No, you don't even despise me," she rejoined. "You don't think enough about me for that. To you I am

just an ordinary little piece of furniture, slightly ornamental, but not at all useful. I should make no gap in your life were I to be removed." She looked up at Cadenhouse, half hoping that he would contradict her; but he remained silent, gravely considering.

Miss Kingconstance felt the pause awkward, and broke it ruthlessly.

"But come now, let us discuss you, Babs," she said. "You're tired of being a dreadful child—"

"I'm tired of everything," Babs interrupted, "beginning with Julia. Julia's such a beastly success. The whole place will lie to get me out of scrapes, and they can't do it; but Julia can't be got into a scrape even when they tell the truth about her. I don't want her got into scrapes. I never peach on her myself. But I just tell you this to show you where I am."

"Shall I translate?" said Miss Kingconstance to Cadenhouse.

"I could kick you, Aunt Lorraine," Babs flashed forth upon that. "You are just as bad as the rest—you like to humiliate me. Go away, can't you, and let me talk to Cadenhouse. *He* understands me, for all your sneers."

"Oh, my dear child, I'm sorry," her aunt exclaimed. "I wasn't sneering at you at all."

Babs threw herself into a chair and burst into tears. Miss Kingconstance would fain have caressed and comforted her, but Babs pushed her away.

"I'm tired of you," she sobbed—"I'm tired of everything and everybody. I want a change—something to make me feel differently. Oh, if I could only feel more—or less!"

"Why, my dear child, you have always said that you hated change."

"I know," Babs snapped; "but now I love it. It's monotony that I hate—the same old thing forever and



“‘YOU GIVE ME NOTHING BUT NATURE, AND I’M HUMAN’”

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ever, world without end, and nothing to come of it. I'm as sick of it now as Montacute is. I loathe that horrible greenery out there. You give me nature and nothing but nature, and I'm human ; it is the works of man that claim me. Cadenhouse, you look as neutral as a fish."

Miss Kingconstance, who had been kneeling beside Babs, sat down on the floor, and looked up at Cadenhouse in perplexity.

"What's to be done?" she said, at last.

He stroked his chin.

"There are schools, of course," she pursued—"finishing schools, in London and Paris. The elder girls are taken about—to concerts, to the opera, to picture-galleries—"

Babs roused herself energetically.

"That's it!" she cried. "That's the kind of thing I want. Give me art to make me love nature. Do arrange it, you two, with mamma. I know she'd see reason if the suggestion came from Cadenhouse. Get her to send us away—me and Montacute—to that kind of school. He could go to a tutor or a coach or something close by."

"What do you think?" Miss Kingconstance asked Cadenhouse, dubiously.

"I think there is nothing else for it," he answered.

"*Gloria in excelsis!*" Babs shouted, jumping up. "I'll go and tell Cute."

"But it's not settled," her aunt remonstrated.

"Really, Aunt Lorraine, you're childish," Babs, already at the door, retorted. "You ought to know mamma better by this time."

There was an interval of silence after the door slammed upon Babs, then Miss Kingconstance sighed, "Heigho!"

"I understand Babs," she said. "It is bad for her now ; but it will be worse by-and-by. I was like her once—all life and energy and—hope. Look at me now."

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Cadenhouse was looking at her. Some people are like their own ancestors—they repeat the portraits in the family picture-gallery. But Miss Kingconstance was not like anything that Cadenhouse had ever seen before. She was more like something he had dreamed, and he had expected much from her appearance, but had hitherto been disappointed. She was too much like himself, in that she was not of the past or the present, but of the future, for him to understand her all at once. Miss Kingconstance had appeared prematurely while the east wind of prejudice was still blowing upon the aspirations of women and shrivelling them, and had suffered blight.

“But come out for a turn,” she added. “It is stifling here.”

They made for a green glade in the park, out of sight of the house.

“Do you remember,” she said, “we used often to race down here together when we were boy and girl? What joy it was in those days just to be alive! We shall never feel like that again, Cadenhouse.”

“Why not?” he objected, in his measured way.

“Why?” She laughed mirthlessly. “Why, because you are a grave, dignified man—self-contained, haughty—I don’t know what. But, at any rate, you will never feel like a boy again, while I—” She paused.

“Tell me about yourself, Lorraine.”

“Do you really care to hear?”

“I do, indeed—I greatly care to hear.”

“May I take your arm?”

He held out his arm to her, and she leaned upon him as they paced on together in step, slowly, under the shadowy trees.

“You are what you are by reason of development,” she began. “It is suppression which has made me what I am. Body and soul I am suffering from it—from the

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cruel suppression to which I have been subjected all my life—for no other reason but that I was born to be a woman. In the nursery no part of my frame was properly exercised because ‘little girls must behave, miss.’ In the school-room my mind was left uninformed because ‘girls don’t require so much teaching.’ I was kept immature, or made to be amateur, in everything. In society my wits burned out for want of nourishment. Here, at home, I must waste my womanhood. I must mourn alone in the most absolute of all solitude, the solitude of the heart—husbandless, childless, without a single happy responsibility. Because of these things it has come to pass that there is no more health in me. Mind and body, I am wrong—all wrong.”

“I know,” said Cadenhouse. “I know how it is with women like you under such circumstances. You offer no resistance to the evils of your unnatural environment, and all goes wrong with you. But surely it isn’t too late. You are young, Lorraine, and there are many things still to be done. I seem to have more to do here than anywhere.”

“You—yes. But consider *my* position. What do you think there is for *me* to do in the day? I get up in the morning, and am dressed. Then I breakfast, and after that what do you suppose? You have your estates to manage, your public duties to attend to, your studies.”

“But you are not cut off from study,” he put in, eagerly.

“To what end should I study? Study for study’s sake is as stultifying as art for art’s sake, as unsatisfactory as love for love’s sake—

‘Work without hope drops nectar in a sieve,
And hope without an object cannot live.’”

Cadenhouse was silent for a little.

“I seem to see that you are not to be wasted,” he said,

at last. "What you are feeling so strongly now is only a phase—one of the many through which you must pass, and must pass alone. Life comes to a loose end with all of us at times—a loose end that sways about in every wind that blows, helpless, useless, purposeless, unlovely, until there comes a gust of feeling, and it is caught up and woven once more into the fabric of life from which it was detached—the fabric it was designed to serve and adorn. There is law in all this. I lean to the belief that our desires are creative, that we make circumstances ourselves in certain states of mind. When it comes to me in myself that I shall succeed, I am not sure that I am merely foreseeing success ; it may be that I am compelling it. I am conscious at such moments of a power in myself which is not ordinarily under my control, any more than the power to compose music is, and I believe that that power is the power which compels."

"In that case we must know what we want," said Miss Kingconstance, giving him a curious look.

"Yes, you must know what you want," he answered, simply.

She made a gesture of impatience.

"You are becoming a sort of a priest," she said. "I never see a priest without a feeling of intense pity."

"Why?" he asked, in surprise.

"Because the Lord made him a man, and he was not satisfied with the work of the Lord. He wanted to be an angel before his time, and therefore he wrought and arranged his life so as to mar both the man and the angel."

"I am not an admirer of the priestly character myself," said Cadenhouse, innocent of any personal application. "The vice of the priest is the lust of power. He is greedy to guide ; he claims your obedience always, as though he were wisdom incarnate. His instrument for the refractory is torture, whether of the body or the

mind—here or hereafter. His rewards are anodynes which impair our powers. His rule has fallen as a blight upon every nation which has suffered it. Let no man come between you and your God. Work out your own salvation."

She shrugged her shoulders. She was asking for bread, and he was giving her his opinion.

"But I don't see how religion can stand without its ministers, all the same," she remarked.

"Why should it?" he replied. "The more ministers of religion we have the better. That is the ideal towards which we are tending—we who love religion. We foresee that in the future there will not be any separate priesthood, because every man will be a teacher, every man an inspirer of right."

Miss Kingconstance compressed her lips. "Would every man be as neutral as a fish?" she wondered.

"Do you never come down from the heights?" she exclaimed, after a pause.

He looked at her inquiringly.

"I see," she said; "you don't even understand. Well, never mind. Let us go back and settle that business for Babs. That will be doing something for somebody—which is one of the ways you would prescribe, I believe, for staying hunger of the heart, is it not?"

He looked at her again uneasily, feeling that he had made some mistake, yet quite at a loss.

"Oh, Cadenhouse!" she exclaimed. "If you would only come down sometimes, and be less of a saint and more of a man!"

The saying stayed with Cadenhouse and tormented him.

Late that night in his tower he sat and thought. He had done a good deal for himself. He had lived the life, and to such good purpose that to him at rare moments

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the sixth sense unveiled itself and had ceased to be a wonder and a mystery. But that day, when he would have applied his power to some practical purpose, it had failed him—why?

The question remained unanswered.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE first attempt to persuade Mrs. Kingconstance that it would be for the good of Babs and Montacute to send them away was unsuccessful, but her resistance was purely sentimental. She saw very little of the children, except at meals, as a rule, and did not trouble herself much about them then ; but that did not make any difference with regard to the attitude of her mind on the subject. She declared that her children were all that she had in the world, and it would be cruel to separate her from them. Montacute was delicate, and required a mother's care ; and Babs—well, Babs was tiresome at times, she was obliged to allow, but most children are tiresome. All they want is love.

“ And supervision,” said Miss Kingconstance, dryly.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney agreed with her.

Mr. Worringham was decidedly of opinion that a public school is the proper place for a boy, and stuck to that point strenuously all through the argument, though each time he mentioned it he was reminded that Montacute was too old for a public school, even if he hadn't been too delicate.

Discipline was what Cadenhouse stood out for. He maintained that there was no proper discipline for either girl or boy in such a home as Dane Court.

At this point Mrs. Kingconstance told, irrelevantly, how she had sat up the greater part of one night with Cute when he had pneumonia. She was touched to

tears by the recollection of her own devotion ; and because of the tears the discussion had to be dropped.

But the seed had been sown, and when a few days later Montacute's tutor resigned for a quite insufficient reason, and Babs caused the greatest anxiety by disappearing on her pony in the early morning and not returning till late at night, and then added exasperation to the trouble by coolly explaining that she was so sick of the sight of "greenery" that she had been obliged to ride to the market town (a distance of thirty-four miles there and back) to see the shops and shake off the obsession of nature by the contemplation of human nature, Mrs. Kingconstance gave way. She could not, of course, spare Julia ; and indeed there was no necessity, she said, that dear child being all that she ought to be, and so like herself at that age ; but Babs must be put under proper control immediately, and it would be better for Montacute, doubtless, to be with boys of his own age for a little.

During all that trying time Mr. Jellybond Tinney was a great help to Mrs. Kingconstance. He showed her herself in the noble character of self-sacrificing mother while the arrangements were being made for the departure of the children, and after they had gone he comforted her with cordial. He it was who met her at the station on her return from London, whither she had gone to see the children settled. Nobody else, as it happened, except the coachman, knew exactly when to expect her. It was a lovely afternoon, but of course the dear lady was very much upset.

"Now I should recommend," Mr. Jellybond said, "if I might venture, striking out in a new direction. I am sure you didn't eat much luncheon—if any. I felt sure you would not, and I made a little plan."

Mrs. Kingconstance was curious to know what the little plan was. They were seated side by side in her

carriage, driving through the sweet green lanes together—that long seventeen miles from the station.

“Well, I propose a sort of little picnic in the forest.”

“A sort of picnic in the forest? You and me together?” she exclaimed, with deprecation in her voice and delight in her countenance.

“Oh no, my dear lady, certainly not—exactly.”

He seemed rather shocked at the suggestion, and Mrs. Kingconstance perceiving this, blushed at her own indiscretion.

“What I propose is—” He broke off artistically. “Do you remember that day I called upon you first? Ah, how long ago it seems now! How much has happened since!”

“How much, indeed!” she sighed, and none the less sincerely because she could hardly have mentioned any event in proof. Life is punctuated by sensation much more acutely than by circumstance, and it was emotional changes she had in her mind when she spoke—the changes wrought by Mr. Jellybond.

“But do you remember?” he resumed. “We were jesting. It seems to me now that we were very young that day—at least, *I* was. You are always young.”

He gazed at her intently. Mrs. Kingconstance became pleasantly embarrassed.

“You were saying—” she observed, to cover her confusion.

“I was going to remind you of some little nonsense we talked about palmistry.”

“I remember!” she exclaimed. “You were going to bring a palmist—just for fun, you know—to tell us about the lines.”

“The lines that are alike in our hands,” he supplemented. “The person I alluded to is living now in the forest. And I thought *this* afternoon—just for distraction, you know—it might amuse you to go and see

her. She is quite respectable," he hastened to add ; " eminently respectable, although of gypsy blood. She was, in fact, one of the Lees. But of course I would not allow you to go near one who was not respectable."

" No, of course not," said Mrs. Kingconstance. " But what do you propose, exactly ?"

" This is what I propose," he answered, lowering his voice—" if you approve of the arrangement. The road on this side of the forest passes close to Thorne Lodge, where the good lady lives, and I thought, if you sent on the carriage and walked the rest of the way— But could you ?—would you be equal to it ? I always wonder how those little feet support you at all."

" Oh, but I'm a good walker," Mrs. Kingconstance simpered. She would not have called herself so ordinarily ; but the excitement of the adventure had seized upon her, and the Indian summer of elderly passion, the least controllable, was beginning to rouse her out of her groove. " Stop the carriage when you like," she said. " The servants won't think it odd, I suppose ?"

" I had not considered that chance," he replied.

Her countenance fell.

" What is to be done ?" she wanted to know.

" It is a delicate matter," he reflected aloud. " You are not in the habit of leaving the carriage in this way, I suppose ?"

She shook her head, and inwardly wished that she had been.

" What a pity !" he ejaculated. " Anything unusual, you know, causes comment in the servants' hall. I'm afraid we must give it up."

She showed her disappointment.

" If they put us down on the road to the village ?" she ventured to suggest.

" They need not know that we are going into the forest at all ? Hum. We must remember that there are other

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people who might see us. No. We must avoid all appearance of mystery. My original suggestion was the best. Let us be put down on the high-road and send word that we are walking home."

By this time Mrs. Kingconstance was so set upon going to Thorne Lodge that she would have accepted any suggestion.

The little house deep in the forest, with its high, thatched roof, its flowering creepers, its rustic garden where the bees hummed, and the thick privet hedge by which its privacy was effectually secured from the rare passer-by, might well have been the home of some beneficent fairy. Mrs. Kingconstance was charmed with its aspect outside, and still more charmed with the interior. She had become quite flighty and giggly since they entered the wood.

"It is so very funny, you know," she said; "the most unconventional thing I have ever done in my life. Quite an *Arabian Nights*' entertainment!"

Mr. Jellybond Tinney knocked at the door impressively three times, then held up a finger to enjoin self-control, at the same time assuring the lady in a tragic whisper that she need not be nervous. These manœuvres had the desired effect. Mrs. Kingconstance began to thrill.

The door opened wide, but there was nobody to be seen.

"Enter without fear," said Mr. Jellybond Tinney.

Mrs. Kingconstance immediately began to tremble, but obeyed.

The front door shut itself after them, there was a moment's darkness, then another door opened with a click, and Mrs. Kingconstance saw before her what looked at the first glance like a glimpse of an old church, all bathed in an exquisite atmosphere of greeny light. Furniture and walls and ceiling were all dark oak, the floor was red

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bricks, the mellow light came through the diamond panes of a lattice window. There was very little furniture—a carved oak settle beneath the window, cushioned with red, a high oak chair to match, and a round table. Mrs. Kingconstance sank down upon the settle and looked about her. There was now no sign of any door.

“I am almost frightened,” she whispered.

Mr. Jellybond smiled.

“Not when I am here, I hope,” he said. “The atmosphere of the place is not the ordinary atmosphere of earth, I confess—”

“It is all so odd and unexpected,” Mrs. Kingconstance put in.

He looked around complacently, like one who is proud of an effect. The place had been changed as by magic since Babs saw it, but there was no smell of new wood or varnish. Mr. Jellybond knew where old oak was to be had for the price of new deal, so that there was no deception in regard to the age of anything. The only wonder was how such things came to be there at all; but Mrs. Kingconstance did not wonder. She was too much impressed and too expectant to be even ordinarily critical.

“But is there no one here?” she said, at last. The silence was becoming oppressive.

A part of the panelling slid away immediately, and an old woman, dressed in dark red, stood in the aperture. She courtesied to the rich lady, but the expression in her shrewd dark eyes was not so humble as her obeisance.

“Does my lady require anything?” she asked.

Mrs. Kingconstance in her astonishment lost her presence of mind.

“And if I remember rightly, in the *Arabian Nights*,” Mr. Jellybond proceeded, “the adventuring princess was always ready for a light refection. I once boasted

to you that I could cook," he added, " now you shall see. Good mother, my uniform."

The old woman brought him a white cap, an apron, and long white sleeves. He put them on, and looked more of a gentleman in them than in his ordinary dress. His hand with the signet-ring on it looked particularly refined and well kept. Any one would have said a man of position at play.

" I always like to dress for my part," he said, " whatever it be."

The facile use of the subjunctive gave an effect of fastidiousness to his language at the moment which also bespoke respect. The old woman brought in another small table, on which were several plated pannikins and a spirit lamp. Mr. Jellybond peeped into the pannikins, then he lighted the lamp, and then began to stir and beat and watch with the absorbed interest of an artist in his work. The old woman meanwhile laid the other small table for two, decorated it with flowers, and pushed it in front of Mrs. Kingconstance. The place was soon filled with savory odors. Mrs. Kingconstance sniffed involuntarily and her mouth watered ; her superstitious tremors passed and she found herself at her ease.

" Really, I am ravenous !" she exclaimed.

" We hoped we might induce an appetite," said Mr. Jellybond, playfully. "' We ' is the king of cooks. We have been the whole morning preparing dainties for our lady, and I will undertake to say that there is not a single dish here of which she has ever partaken before in this form. I only hope she will find each as excellent as it is rare. Good mother, all is ready. Serve us, if you please."

Mr. Jellybond Tinney had made no vain boast.

" I never tasted anything so good," Mrs. Kingconstance commented, after each dish. " I only wish I could afford to keep such a cook."

Mr. Jellybond gazed at her tenderly.

"I pride myself on being an amateur in the art," he said. "What a joy it would be to be always at hand to prepare you a little refection! But stay. Have you noticed nothing wanting?"

Mrs. Kingconstance glanced about her vaguely. The old woman stood by, shrewdly observing her. It passed through Mrs. Kingconstance's mind that there were no powdered footmen; but that could not be it. She looked at the table.

"I have it," she said. "Nothing to drink."

The old woman brought a silver salver on which were some miniature decanters of quaint design and two crystal goblets. She set them before Mr. Jellybond Tinney, who placed his finger daintily on the stopper of one of the decanters as if he were blessing it.

"Now this is to be the finishing touch," he said, "this cordial which I am about to concoct for you. Nothing so vulgar as champagne would do for my lady. I promise her a draught of nectar."

"Oh, don't make it too strong," she exclaimed.

"Not strong, of course," he rejoined, "but subtle—an Elysian draught, in fact."

"What lovely little bottles!" she said. "Surely they don't belong—" She glanced round.

"Oh, no," he answered, measuring out the liquids for the cordial as he talked. "These are my things—my own little private *batterie de cuisine*, et cetera. I have a laboratory in my own house where I pursue the science and art of *la haute cuisine*. Did I tell you about it? I hope to show it to you some day. But this afternoon in the carriage, if you remember, I told you that I had prepared a little picnic. The ordinary picnic—sitting on the ground, eating cold indigestibles, contracting rheumatism, and warring with insects—does not appeal to me. My lady required distraction, and I was deter-

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mined she should have it ; but in comfort. Your seat is cosy ?”

“ It is luxurious.”

“ And this is not like anything else you have ever done, I will undertake to say.”

“ No, indeed ; it is quite original. But you are nothing if not unexpected. I’m so glad I came.”

“ You can imagine how disappointed I should have been if you had not.”

He handed her the cordial. She sipped—and sipped again.

“ Nectar, indeed,” she ejaculated. “ What is it ?”

He smiled enigmatically, raised his own goblet, and also sipped.

“ To my lady,” he said.

The light fell tenderly upon him through the diamond panes of the lattice window, and upon the dark, polished panels of the comfortable old house-place. It looked like an oak parlor of two hundred years ago, with a little touch of modern comfort in disguise added to relieve the severity. Mrs. Kingconstance nestled among her cushions. The footstool she found at her feet was just the right height. The little round table at which they sat shone resplendent when the cloth was withdrawn. There was only one dish of fruit for dessert, but then such fruit ! —a joy to the eye and a delight to the palate. Mrs. Kingconstance vowed she could not tell which was the greater gratification, seeing it or eating it.

Mr. Jellybond opened a case full of gold-tipped cigarettes, half held it out to her, and archly smiled.

“ Have you ever ?” he breathed.

She acknowledged that she had.

“ Not before the children, you know. But Lorraine does, regularly. Do you think it is a bad habit ?”

“ I think it is a good resource in times of trouble,” he said. “ Soothing, sedative. Just one ?”

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As she took it she observed that his eyes were kind.

The smoke of the perfumed cigarettes went up. The delicious fragrance of coffee pervaded the place. A gracious sense of well-being suffused her, a consciousness of ethereal happiness, compared with which any pleasure she had ever before experienced seemed gross. Between the whiffs of her cigarette she sipped her coffee daintily, as she had sipped her cordial. Mr. Jellybond also smoked and sipped. Little remarks about nothing fell from them at intervals; but the perfection of companionship had set in, they were independent of talk. Mrs. Kingconstance wished that the moment might last forever.

The witch, meanwhile, looked on as a cook might at some process of confection upon which her credit depended.

Presently Mrs. Kingconstance observed that she had a pack of cards in her hand.

Mr. Jellybond looked at his watch.

"Alas! we must respect the enemy," he said. "Shall we ask the good mother to spear?"

"Good mother, sit down and tell us what to anticipate," Mrs. Kingconstance said, graciously. "Tell us all the good there is in store for us."

"Let me see your hands, lady," the woman said.

She sat down beside Mrs. Kingconstance and looked into one hand and then into the other, comparing them.

"You've had your troubles," she said, oracularly, "and you've made them; and you'll have your troubles again, and you'll make them. That's in your nature. You've lost by death, and you'll lose by death again."

"Oh, no, no, I hope not!" Mrs. Kingconstance ejaculated.

"You've married once, and you'll marry again."

Mrs. Kingconstance looked up involuntarily. Mr. Jellybond Tinney had delicately withdrawn.

"Are you sure?" she whispered.

"You'll marry again," the woman repeated, imperturbably; "not for money this time, nor for position, but for comfort. When the lover comes as ses: 'I've nothing to offer you but happiness, my lady,' you'll take him, if you're wise; you'll leave him, if you must. If you take him, you'll know what joy is."

"Will it be like this afternoon—that cordial—?" She clutched at her throat in the effort to express herself. "Like young love?"

"It will be like young love, because love is always young," the woman answered; "and it will be like this afternoon—only it will last. The joy, when it comes, will come to stay; and the more you take him in the face of everybody the better it will be. But if you leave him, it will be loss, loss, loss."

"Can't you tell me who it is?" Mrs. Kingconstance pleaded.

"You'll know time enough, if you don't know already," the old woman answered. "You'll never have no doubt in yourself, whatever you may say, from the moment you think of him *and* marriage."

"Time is up," said Mr. Jellybond from the doorway. "I must hurry my lady home."

CHAPTER XXVII

THAT picnic in the wood was the beginning of a very good time for Mrs. Kingconstance. She would not have called it a good time ; she would have considered the expression—well, not quite nice, you know.

She was as romantic as a schoolgirl—and so was Mr. Jellybond Tinney. There was no reason why they should not have met when they chose in the ordinary way ; their doing so would have excited no comment. Mr. Jellybond had always been in the habit of dividing himself up pretty equally among the ladies of the neighborhood. If he were seen with Mrs. Kingconstance one day, he was seen the next with Mrs. Normanton, the next with some one else, and each lady was so satisfied with his attentions that she lived upon the recollection, to the exclusion of any other idea with regard to him, until they met again. Consequently, so far as he was concerned, scandal slumbered and slept. His safety lay in the number of strings he had to his bow.

But neither he nor Mrs. Kingconstance would have been satisfied now with anything ordinary in the way of reunions. There is no thrill like the thrill of romantic adventure, especially to a person who tastes it for the first time late in life after an absolutely conventional career ; and the one experience Mrs. Kingconstance had had of it had set up a craving for more, which it taxed all Mr. Jellybond Tinney's ingenuity to satisfy. He would not allow her to cross the confines of the compromising,

but kept her hovering on the borders, where she delighted to be, his intention being to crown an honorable career in the county, and safely establish himself in everybody's estimation by marrying her eventually—an intention which would have been frustrated by the slightest pre-nuptial scandal. Cadenhouse's influence in that respect was supreme in the neighborhood. Everybody respected the appearance of propriety, and strove to preserve it, whatever happened.

But Mr. Jellybond Tinney found food for Mrs. Kingconstance's newly developed love of excitement in many innocent little games—into which cooking, cordial, cigarettes, and coffee came as regularly as afternoon tea into her ordinary life. These, indeed, were the staple of every entertainment, the end in view, whatever other intention formed the pretence of an expedition. There had been no talk of marriage between them, no formal proposal, no serious love-making. A little dainty tic-toying was enough for the present—enough for Mr. Jellybond, because there was business in his attitude towards Mrs. Kingconstance ; and for her because the romantic moments of later life are necessarily numbered. These were her last, perhaps ; and she strove involuntarily to prolong them, to make the most of each in its turn without a thought of the next. Besides, another consideration held them in check.

They both knew that the cooking, cordial, cigarettes, and coffee would have quite a different flavor when they could be had without difficulty ; and that when there were no more plans to be made the aspect of all things would alter, and life would again become as insipid as exercise on a wooden horse. Only Mrs. Kingconstance naturally felt this more than Mr. Jellybond, because he had more plans than matrimony in his mind—matrimony being to him a means to other ends, but to Mrs. Kingconstance an end in itself. And because he had

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other ideas in his mind, it was Mr. Jellybond who tired first of playing at romance, and determined to come to the point. He arrived at this determination one morning at breakfast. In the afternoon he dressed for the part.

When he arrived at Dane Court he found Mrs. Kingconstance feeling rather low. Her sister-in-law was ill in bed with influenza ; Julia had gone to spend the day and night with Meg Normanton, and Mrs. Kingconstance proclaimed herself out of sorts.

"No," said Mr. Jellybond, "you are not out of sorts—pardon me for contradicting you. You are looking splendid, which you would not be if you were out of sorts. Oh, health, health is the great beautifier ! I congratulate my lady on her radiant health."

"Well, there's something the matter," said Mrs. Kingconstance, beaming upon him.

"Of course there is," he agreed. "You're bored ; that's what you're suffering from—boredom. You require distraction, and you must have it. Let me see. Ask me to stay to dinner, and let us dine together in the tent. I will send for my *batterie*, and there shall be a dainty dish to set before my queen, I promise you."

Mrs. Kingconstance clapped her hands affectedly.

"Delightful !" she exclaimed. "But we ought to have a third person."

"Oh, the bother of the chaperon !" he sighed. "Well, ask somebody who can't come—the vicar and Miss Spice. She had a dreadful toothache, and he has taken her to town to see the dentist. They cannot possibly be back in time."

"Oh, naughty ! naughty !" Mrs. Kingconstance cried, with elaborate playfulness.

"Do !" he urged.

"Shall I ?" she asked of all things, with a flutter of her hands, palms outward. She was not made to be

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volatile—her figure was much too solid for that pose ; but she was happily unconscious of any discrepancy between her appearance and her manner. People usually are, unfortunately for observers with any appreciation of æsthetic values. But in that respect Mr. Jellybond was not nice. When a handsome, rather stout, elderly woman became youthful and flighty in his presence, all he saw was the compliment to himself.

He offered her his arm and led her to the writing-table. She made some further pretence of hesitating, then wrote the notes, and asked him to ring.

“ Thomas,” she said to the footman, “ dinner in the tent—for four. Tell Benson, and take these notes at once. Send also to the Swiss Cottage—”

“ I’d better go and see about that myself,” Mr. Jellybond interrupted. “ What had you thought of for dinner ? But, never mind. I’ll go and consult with the cook. You must leave everything to me. Thomas, I shall want your help, please.”

When they had gone Mrs. Kingconstance ran up to a mirror, patted her hair with both hands, and smiled at herself complacently. Then she began to think about what she should wear—amber or purple. While so engaged her eye happened to light on a letter which was lying unopened on her writing-table. It had come by the morning post, but she had not troubled about it.

She knew what it was—an informal sort of report, which came periodically from Montacute’s tutor. She opened it now and glanced at it. Hitherto Montacute had always been reported as well and doing well. This time she gathered that his health was not satisfactory, and the tutor asked if there were anything she would like to have done. Montacute’s health never had been satisfactory, so that did not strike her as unusual ; and what could she have done ? What did the man mean ? As she could not imagine, she put the letter in her pocket,

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thinking she would consult Mr. Jellybond about it—and not worry.

The tent was a new departure at Dane Court. It was Mr. Jellybond's idea, and he had ordered it, chosen a lovely site for it in the grounds, and seen to its decoration himself. Outside it was a mere ordinary good, thick, double-waterproof tent; but inside it was arranged with all the silken luxury the lady loved. The neighborhood had been as much excited about that tent as if it had been an item added to the progress of civilization; and Mrs. Kingconstance had given many delightful little parties there. During the long summer evenings the guests were invited to see the sunset. Now the attraction was the autumn moon. But it was the end of September, and, although that particular day was hot, there could not be much more weather suitable for the tent. Mrs. Kingconstance sighed at the reflection. It was sad to think that there must be an end to such a summer.

When at last she tripped down-stairs, dressed for the evening in purple and black, and not looking thirty, she found her own carriage waiting at the door, and was informed that the coachman had gone, according to orders, to fetch Miss Spice and Mr. Worringham, but neither of them had returned from town.

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Kingconstance, innocently. "Well, we won't wait."

She stepped into the carriage and was driven to the tent. There she found all things ready and all things exquisite. The weather, the view, the color and sheen of silken draperies, the easy lounges and great down cushions, the flowers, the tender perfume of the evening air, the rose-tinted lamps within, the delicate lilac twilight without—all united to make the scene a dream of luxurious ease and beauty. Such a scene would have appealed to Mrs. Kingconstance's pampered senses at any

time, but did so just then especially because of the haze of romantic feeling, the simmering passion, which added a potent charm to everything and rendered her peculiarly susceptible to all that influences to ecstasy.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney handed her from the carriage.

"Where are the other dear people?" he asked.

"Still in town—just fancy!" she answered, inwardly priding herself on a strict adherence to the truth. "But never mind; we'll dine all the same."

The dinner began with a *hors d'oeuvre* in apotheosis—a morsel of delight which Mrs. Kingconstance would fain have repeated, but Mr. Jellybond would not allow her.

"Regret that there is not more of it is the attitude of mind which proves the success of the *hors d'oeuvre*," he said; "but it does not do to repeat the pleasure. Consolation comes with the *consommé*, if it be right; if not, with the *poisson*."

When the servants were out of ear-shot Mrs. Kingconstance said to him gayly:

"Don't you think we're a loss to the stage? That last little farce, when I descended from the carriage, seemed to me to be most convincing."

"Oh, entirely convincing," he agreed.

The good lady's whole nature seemed to have changed under the influence of her recent emotional experiences. No one would have suspected that she was capable of any sort of intrigue, and here she was delighting in it—so long as no actual untruth was told; delighting in the success of petty deceits, of shifts and contrivances, which not so very long before she would have been the first to stigmatize as contemptible. When passion is added to luxurious habits weak people are apt to be demoralized, and Mrs. Kingconstance was weak. It was Mr. Jellybond Tinney's caution, and not her own prudence, that had kept her within bounds at all.

She made a lovely bit of color reclining there on her

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satin cushions, with her milk-white skin, the brilliant carmine of her cheeks and lips, her glossy black hair, and her purple draperies. Mr. Jellybond Tinney, who had always admired her, found himself gazing at her now in surprise and curiosity. She seemed to have entered upon a new phase of beauty—a firmer phase. The flabbiness of body and mind induced by much lolling, carriage exercise, high living, and profound self-content had disappeared in a burst of energy—one of those flashes of youth which startle us on occasion in a friend whom we have never thought of as young. It is true that she lolled on her great down cushions now, but there was an alertness in her glance which belied her attitude. She looked as if on the slightest provocation she could have straightened herself and shown forcefulness both of character and constitution.

During dinner the conversation ran on the various dishes principally, a subject of the keenest interest. The “slight refection” consisted of many courses that night, and Mrs. Kingconstance took a morsel of each, and loved that morsel as she ate it; and, while waiting for the next course, discussed its merits as a morsel with more intelligence than she was wont to bring to the discussion of any other matter. Yet very little was said. When the senses are satisfied the mind has but scant appeal. Men give themselves up to such moments more readily than women do, but these two were quite in accord. The servants moved like shadows about them; they paid no heed to their presence. The twilight without deepened to darkness; then came the moon, unseen itself, but showing the hills, the sky, the quiet woods in an enchanted haze, an ecstasy of silvery light. They watched the gathering splendor, the beautiful transformation scene, in silence—and were reminded of something once seen in an opera, the name of which they could not recollect. But what did it matter?

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The dessert was set ; the moment for the cordial had come. They sipped it in solemn silence. Mrs. Kingconstance would not have spoiled its influence for a moment by a word. She held her own being in suspense so as to lose no movement of the liquid delight as it spread insidiously, taking gradual possession of every nerve in her body, and suffusing her at the same time with a strange, warm glow, which was succeeded by a sensation of bliss, a dreamy state, a kind of stupor, although full consciousness was never suspended.

Whatever the potent mixture was (and Mr. Jellybond never would tell her), there was no baneful reaction after it. It played *crescendo* upon the emotions and then evaporated, leaving only a certain languor which yielded to strong coffee, and such a recollection of its effect as should make it to be greatly desired forevermore.

When the coffee was served, the cigarettes lighted, and the servants had retired, Mr. Jellybond determined to propose. But while he waited he experienced a curious flood of recollection. His thoughts strayed to his first arrival in the neighborhood, his first meeting with Miss Spice, and to all that was important in their subsequent acquaintance. Poor little Ally ! Well, she owed him some happy days. He thought of his first visit to Mrs. Normanton, and with the recollection there came the consciousness of the balmy odor of pine-trees with the sun upon them, and of the cawing of rooks ; the happy accompaniment to that impromptu tea which had been such a success. He thought of Fanny Sturdy, of Mrs. Japp, and of Florence—particularly of Florence. There came to him also a vision of the long evenings alone, those delicious evenings of ample leisure, undisturbed by any ache, when he first discovered fiction, and, yielding to the wondrous spell, was borne into hitherto unsuspected realms of thought and emotion, was made acquainted with hitherto unsuspected varieties of man-

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kind, with strange phases of life, curious complexities of character, of motives, of alternating moods, and endless other subtleties of being. Having seen enough in his own career to enable him to recognize the truth, the interest, and the importance of a good delineation, he had become a most appreciative reader. He delighted in romantic incident; but analytical work fascinated him even more. When the two were combined, he revelled. From mere dramatic scenes he went empty away, because he was not content only to see the characters play their parts; he wanted also to see the working of the machinery that moved them.

Certainly his uneventful life in Danehurst had been wonderfully rich in eccentric emotions. Talk of the joy of eventful living! Who that has known both would compare events of action with events of feeling? Simple living and complex feeling—that is bliss. And could he improve upon the experiences of his later life by any change? The question rose involuntarily. He had thought his mind fully made up; but— He looked at Mrs. Kingconstance. Half turned from the table, she reclined upon her pillows. One arm rested upon the back of the couch. She held her cigarette daintily between her two fingers. Her eyes were fixed upon the moonlit distance. The animation of the earlier part of the evening had gone. She seemed to have sunk into sensuous apathy, and was looking as beautiful and as stupid as an odalisque.

Should he propose?

His eyes searched the floor as if for an answer; and in their search they lighted upon a letter. He picked it up.

"My lady has dropped a letter," he said, holding it out.

She looked at it languidly.

"It is probably the one I had to-day about Montacute," she remarked. "I brought it down to show you. I wish you would read it. I didn't half take it in."

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She spoke indifferently, but was vexed at the interruption which was spoiling her mood.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney adjusted his gold-rimmed *pince-nez*, read the letter with the careful attention of a business man, replaced it in its envelope, and looked at Mrs. Kingconstance with pursed-up lips.

"Well?" she demanded.

"What do you think of doing?" he asked.

"Doing?" she echoed, vaguely.

"Yes," he replied. "The boy is ill, evidently—at least, that is what I gather. They are anxious about him, but do not wish to alarm you."

"Let me see the letter again," she said, somewhat impatiently.

When she had read it she looked inquiringly at Mr. Jellybond.

"What do you suggest?" she asked.

"I think some one should go and see how he is exactly. It may be nothing; it may be serious."

Mrs. Kingconstance was silent. There was no lack of kindness in Mr. Jellybond Tinney, and her hesitation caused him an uncomfortable qualm. When birds want to build a new nest they drive their old brood away. Mrs. Kingconstance was in somewhat the same mood, and she was inclined to resent any attempt to make her anxious about the children.

"Would you trust me to go?" Mr. Jellybond Tinney ventured, after a pause.

She considered. What should she do with herself while he was away?

"Is there really any need for any one to go?" she asked. "I can write, you know."

"I think it would be better for some one to go," he answered, decidedly. "I'll go to-morrow."

"Oh, dear!" Mrs. Kingconstance exclaimed; "why will people get ill? This has quite spoiled our evening."

"Poor, dear lady!" he said.

An acute person would have perceived that his sympathy was perfunctory. Mrs. Kingconstance accepted it as serious, and was mollified.

"Don't go to-morrow, at all events, please," she pleaded, after a little reflection. "Let me write first and see what they say. And I should like to consult Mr. Worringham. I will send for him when they answer my letter, and for you too, if you will be so good as to come."

Mr. Jellybond gave her a curious look. He did not appreciate the fact that it was on his account that the maternal instinct was at fault for once. At the moment he liked her less than any of his ladies, and the idea of proposing that night melted from his mind.

"As you wish," he said, coldly. "Your mother's heart should be the best guide at such a time."

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Kingconstance, taking him literally, as usual. "You can trust a mother's intuition."

If happiness be worth having, the people to be envied are the comfortably stupid; no amount of intelligence would purchase the peace of mind which is theirs. Think what it must be to have no doubt of yourself, of the value of your own opinion, nor of the satisfaction you give to your Maker! When Mrs. Kingconstance said her prayers that night she not only thanked God for all the mercies he had vouchsafed to her, but for those which He had in store. She confided herself and her children with confidence to the care of Heaven, and also told Heaven what to do for them, that there might be no mistake. Then she slept tranquilly and dreamed of herself in an atmosphere of ecstasy of the density of cigarette smoke, with somebody's arm about her.

CHAPTER XXVIII

IT was some days before Mrs. Kingconstance summoned Mr. Jellybond Tinney to consult with Mr. Worringham about Montacute's health. Miss Kingconstance, convalescent from influenza, was present at the interview, lying on a sofa, in a state of suppressed irritation. She had been very queer for some time.

"I want to ask you," Mrs. Kingconstance began, addressing Mr. Worringham. "I am anxious about Montacute—his health, you know. I had rather an alarming letter the other day; but you know he has never been strong; so I wrote again for more information, and this is the reply. I wish you would read it, and tell me what you think. It is all so vague, you see."

She watched Mr. Worringham while he read, and when he had finished she repeated:

"It is all so vague, you see. It is delightful to have the children at home, of course" (as she spoke, she distinctly perceived that, with their sharp eyes about, there could be no more romantic philanderings with Mr. Jellybond Tinney), "but a mother must think more of what is good for her children than of what is agreeable to herself. Now Cute has improved very much since he left home. He is inches taller and much more manly—isn't he, Mr. Jellybond? You noticed a great difference last holidays. And he enjoys his life; so I would not like to do anything to unsettle him—unless, of course, you consider it absolutely necessary. Boys at school are so

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very easily unsettled, although, of course, Montacute is not at school exactly—only with a tutor, you know; but it amounts to the same thing, because there are other boys. What do you think, Mr. Worringham?"

"Essentially," he said. "Yes, essentially."

Mrs. Kingconstance looked at him inquiringly.

"It amounts to the same thing, you know," he explained.

"That doesn't get us much further," Miss Kingconstance snapped.

"It was about unsettling him, I was thinking," Mrs. Kingconstance hastily put in, anxious to prevent a breach of the peace. "I am afraid to be too precipitate."

"Naturally," said Mr. Worringham. "It is a mistake to be too precipitate."

"Boys at school are so very easily unsettled," she suggested.

"That's it, dear lady—yes," he agreed, "that's it exactly. Why, when I was at school I experienced that more than once myself. On one occasion, in particular—how well I remember it!—my mother wrote to tell me she was going to send me a hamper, and—would you believe it?—I could do nothing after I heard of that hamper but wonder what would be in it. I never learned a lesson that week—I didn't, indeed. It interfered with my prayers even. When I tried to learn the multiplication table it looked like a row of good things which resolved themselves into a sum to be divided by eight—exactly the number of boys in my dormitory. And I was so full of ideas on the subject that when my master asked me one morning which were the vowels, instead of answering 'a, e, i, o, u, and sometimes w and y,' I said 'goose, turkey, tongue, jam, and cake, and sometimes fruit and wine.' I did, indeed. The master said, 'Impertinence,' and thrashed me for it. But it wasn't impertinence, you know. It just showed what I was thinking about, don't

you know—that was all. But how one's ideas do change, to be sure ! Why, the prospect of a hamper nowadays would not distract me for a moment. So you see, dear lady—”

But here the good gentleman was obliged to pause. That last little stream of reflection dashing into the steadier current of his reminiscences had put him out. He made an effort to find the point which he had intended the anecdote to illustrate, but failed, and could only beam round on them all pleasantly by way of conclusion.

Miss Kingconstance looked up at the ceiling with an exclamation of impatience. Mrs. Kingconstance took her own view of the matter.

“ Then you agree with me that I had better not do anything to unsettle him ? ” she said.

“ Oh, quite,” he replied.

“ But the question is,” said Mr. Jellybond Tinney, speaking for the first time, “ what *are* you going to do ? ”

Miss Kingconstance lowered her eyes and looked at him shrewdly.

“ Oh, well, I thought—” Mrs. Kingconstance began. “ Cute is very studious, you know. It is more than probable he has overworked himself ; in which case rest and a little change—to the seaside, perhaps, for a week or two—”

“ Rest and a little fiddlestick,” said Miss Kingconstance. “ Bring him home at once, and have the best advice that can be got for him. Cute's health is not a thing to be trifled with.”

“ I am entirely of your opinion,” said Mr. Jellybond.

“ For once ! ” she said. “ Well, I'm glad of it on this occasion. I saw that you had arrived with your mind made up. I notice that you are naturally impatient of shilly-shally, in spite of your drawl. You were not born with that drawl, I suspect. At all events there is no drawl in your character.”

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"There used not to be," he said, sincerely; "but somehow I am not quite the man I was."

"You've been letting yourself go," she said. "You're getting flabby."

He rested his chin on the top of his walking-stick, and perused the carpet.

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Kingconstance. "Please don't quarrel when I am in such a difficulty."

"There is no difficulty," Miss Kingconstance replied. "Montacute is ill and must be brought home at once. I am ill, so I can't go and fetch him. You are not a woman of action. We must rely on Mr. Jellybond."

"Mr. Jellybond is to be relied upon," he answered for himself. "He has made his arrangements and is ready to depart by the first train in the morning."

"But we've not discussed the matter at all," said Mrs. Kingconstance, peevishly. "You are going too fast, you two. Mr. Worringham, what do you think?"

She spoke so sharply that the old vicar sat up.

"I—er—think so, too," he said.

"You think they're going too fast?"

"Er—no, on this occasion I think the faster the better."

Mrs. Kingconstance yielded with an ill grace. Mr. Jellybond was the last to go. She wished him to spend the evening with her, but he firmly refused.

"An important matter requires my attention in another direction," he said. "A duty, you may be sure—or I could not resist the temptation."

Mrs. Kingconstance smiled, but there was a chill at her heart. She felt instinctively that the first note of change had struck, and found herself full of vague apprehension.

"I should like to go to Thorne Lodge," she whispered.

"That is where I am going," he answered, looking into her eyes significantly.

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"Then I am content to let you go," she said, holding out both hands to him.

He raised them to his lips, held them an instant, gently restored them to her, and was gone.

It was a most effective exit. Mrs. Kingconstance stood still for some seconds listening to his receding footsteps; then she clasped her hands to her heart, sighed, glanced at herself in a mirror, and went off to dress for dinner.

That evening she took a little dry champagne to keep her up.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney went his way full of thought. He felt no chill of apprehension, such as Mrs. Kingconstance suffered, nevertheless he was not quite himself. He had the sensation which comes when storms are brewing—a sense of pause, of oppression, of expectation, of something solemn pending.

The moon shone brightly down upon him as he emerged from the avenue. He crossed the high-road and climbed the hill, making direct for Thorne Lodge by the shortest cut. The hill was high and steep, and, on the brow of it, before entering the forest, he paused to take breath. The scene was familiar enough to him; but that night he discovered something strange in the aspect of the most familiar things.

Beneath him, on the right, stood Dane Court, the whole front of the house, with lights in many of the windows, distinctly visible. Much farther away, on the left, across the hollow—seen above a dark, irregular line of trees, and not so much seen as imagined by one who knew the lie of it well—the moonlight fell on the high, old chimneys, the pointed gables, and sloping roofs of the all but deserted mansion of Wyldeholme. Why was it left silent and solitary, so fine a place, and why is it that always in this world some one despises what another is dying to have? To be an English landed gentle-

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man, to have wealth and position and power, to feel that wherever you went you were wanted and respected, not just tolerated, and noticed or neglected according to the convenience of the moment—to be born to these things must be grand ; but to rise to them, to feel the pride and privilege of them after having experienced all the galling contrast of life in a lower grade, must be glory. So mused Mr. Jellybond Tinney, and wondered at himself.

It was not so very long since the idea of living as he was living then, master of the Swiss Cottage and moving in good society, would have appeared the idlest of day-dreams to him ; yet here he stood in the moonlight, feeling a fine contempt for his present position, as if the step which should raise him to a higher had been taken, as long as contemplated, and his footing were already secure.

There must have been but a half-developed soul in the man in whom that lovely scene of hill and dale and wood and water, here distinct in the moonlight, there shrouded in shadow, could arouse no sublime emotion—who could contemplate the mystery of the beauty of the heavens and the earth unmoved by nobler thoughts than those which sprang from the sordid desire of self-aggrandisement, the miserable hope of petty renown. But what did Mr. Jellybond Tinney care for the size of his soul or the quality of his ambition so long as he succeeded ? If he had thought of either it would probably have been to congratulate himself upon having gained in comfort what he had lost in nobility before that scene ; he would have rejoiced to feel his spirits rise high above the melancholy that must have laid hold of him had he been weak enough to trouble about the lot of mankind in general at that moment, instead of turning his attention towards the pleasant future which was probably in store for himself in particular.

Following swift upon the desire to possess came the

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assurance in himself that he had only to ask and have, and with the assurance his spirits went up ; so that, when at last he plunged into the wood, considering his age and size, his step was as buoyant as his hopes were high. He even frivelled a little. As he turned off the more frequented way onto the narrow path which led to Thorne Lodge, and passed beneath the great forest trees, the crisp brown leaves came showering down upon him and made a merry crackling under his feet. He began to kick them about. He walked through deep drifts of them as children do. He skipped from one drift to another with singular agility, and, altogether gravely, there alone in the moonlight, he shamed the dignity of his ponderous person by the lightness of his conduct.

About Thorne Lodge all was orderly. From one chimney at the end of the house the smoke curled upward ; but that was the only sign of life about the place. There were no lights in the windows, and all was so still that the babble of an unseen brook close by smote upon the ear obtrusively.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney opened the door and walked in.

"Good mother," he said.

"Good mother" was sitting on the settle with her back to the lattice window. In her hands, which rested on the round table in front of her, she clasped a pack of cards. The moonlight, streaming down upon her through quivering branches of woodbine berries and diamond panes, cast strange shadows upon the floor.

"I know'd you'd come," was her salutation. "I'll light up now."

"The prophetic spirit has not played you false," he said. "But you might have lighted up a little sooner. It feels eerie with all this oak about."

"If it weren't for the eeriness there'd be no prophetic spirit," she said. "It's mightily increased since you got that oak. How are you?"

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"My mind is at ease," he replied. "My conscience is serene as the quiet autumn eve without. What a thing it is to have a good conscience and to be content! I have the one; I am the other. And yet I fain would know."

"Drop it, Tinney," she said. "No fooling here."

She put the lamp on the table, sat down, and began to shuffle the cards in a business-like way.

He took the seat opposite to her.

"Hev' you popped the question yet?" she demanded, abruptly, raising her keen eyes for a moment and peering at him from under her heavy eyebrows. She handed him the cards as she spoke. He shuffled them well without looking at them, laid the pack face downward on the table, cut it in halves, cut each half once to right and left, then pushed the four little packs towards her. She gathered them up.

"The time has not yet come," he said, slowly, in answer to her question.

"I thought it might be that," she muttered, as she laid out the cards in rows before her and proceeded to study the combinations, "for there's a Change coming," she read from the cards, touching three or four with the points of her fingers as she made each separate announcement—"there's a Change coming which You—here—are to Bring About; and it will be a Change for the Better—see?—or I'm much mistaken. But there's Trouble, too—Interference it looks like—and there's Sickness—it's at a Distance, though, and it's this Fair Man; but whether it's a distance of Time or of Place I can't make out. Here, shuffle and cut again, and we'll try for Distance."

"No need," he said, pushing the cards away from him. "I know all about it. The boy is ill and I'm going to fetch him home."

The woman seized the cards excitedly.

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"He's going to die," she said, showing the ace of spades wrong side up; "and if he dies—"

"The more's the pity, poor little chap," said Mr. Jellybond Tinney.

The woman looked at him sharply.

"Are you fooling again?" she demanded.

"No, I'm in earnest for once," he replied. "I say it's a pity. There's that little chap with everything in the world worth having and no power to enjoy it—any of it."

"I grant you that," she said. "But if anything happens to him, so much the better for you."

He gathered up the cards and shuffled them meditatively.

"Well, there's one thing you may be sure of," he said, after a pause, "and that is that nothing will happen to him if I can help it. I'm not a model, I know, but I recognize that there's right and there's wrong, there's good and there's evil, there's crooked and there's straight; and I mean to go straight. I may be a weak fool, but that's my idea."

"So you've always professed," she said, significantly.

"Yes," he rejoined; "and when I lived up to it I did well for myself. It's when I fall away from that idea that I make mistakes."

"You're a queer shot, Tinney," she remarked, looking gratified, as though this eccentricity of his redounded to her credit.

She took the cards from him and began to lay them out in fours. He watched her with interest. When the whole pack was laid she studied the combinations, picking them out as before with the points of her fingers.

"The game is in your own hands," she announced, with a grim smile.

"It always has been," he interjected.

His eyes followed her fingers as they coupled the cards and separated them into groups.

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"The game will be in your own hands," she repeated. "The boy will die sure enough—see, here's his death. *And here are you.*"

Mr. Jellybond Tinney leaned over to look at the combination, and saw something in it which visibly made him pause. Without changing his attitude he raised his eyes to the old woman's face, and they gazed at each other for a tragic interval.

"You can't help it, Tinney," she said, at last, a ring of compassion in her usually hard voice. "What's on the cards is not of your putting. Man is not mightier than fate. That boy's death lies at your door."

"It shall not lie at my door, so help me!" the big man swore. "A man may master his fate when he knows what to fear. I'll do my duty by the boy. I've said it, once for all."

He threw himself back in his chair as he spoke. All his blandness and largeness and air of deliberation had gone out. One might have mistaken him for his own brother in a state of distress.

"Soft heart and hard head are always at war," said the woman. "But never mind, Tinney. There's a good time coming—at least—"

She was looking at the cards again, and as she spoke she changed countenance. His own attention was quickened, and his mood of the moment before was blotted out by a new interest.

"At least, there's something coming that we didn't expect," she pursued in a low voice. "Look here. Here's another Woman coming, here's your Thoughts set upon her, and here's Danger. Here's all you want for the asking, and there you are"—she spoke with infinite disgust—"there *you* are, turning your back on it all for the sake of this Strange Woman."

Once more he leaned over and looked at the cards, and as he did so he seemed to expand again into



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his usual self and become as a fresh fig to a dried one.

"Well, good mother," he said, coolly, "if it's on the cards, what am *I* to do? Fate is fate, as you say. The love of woman is not to be had in heaven. Clearly we were meant to make the most of it herè below. On that score the gods have nothing to reproach me with. I've always taken all the good things sent me in the shape of lovely woman, and praised and blessed them for it. You tell me I've been weak that way. Well, well! I dare say you're right; but what am I to do? I suppose an incorrigible ass is always—er—an ass that is incorrigible."

For answer "good mother" gathered up the cards and flung them in his face. They showered about him, and slid and trickled off him onto the floor—all but one which had stuck in his waistcoat. He took it out and looked at it. It was the ten of hearts.

"Large family and happy wedded life," he said, complaisantly. "I accept the omen. Every other prognostication I cancel."

"Hush, Tinney!" said the woman, glancing about her nervously.

"The powers of darkness be blowed!" he said, jauntily. "I kiss my hand to them. Large family and happy wedded life—that is the omen. Bring the bottles and let us lay the spirits."

The woman's irritation had passed in the act of flinging the cards at him. She rose now with something between apprehension and admiration in her face.

"If you cancel the cards, you dare-devil, it'll be by good luck rather than by good management," she muttered; "but more unlikely things have come to pass."

CHAPTER XXIX

MR. JELLYBOND TINNEY found Montacute lying on a sofa by an open window, looking out listlessly. His head was resting on the window-sill, his eyes were fixed on the people passing to and fro in the park below, but his thoughts were elsewhere—if, indeed, he were thinking at all, which was doubtful. His whole attitude betokened exhaustion; and not only the power to exert himself seemed wanting, but also the wish. He had grown extraordinarily tall, but was thin to emaciation. His natural colorlessness was accentuated by the transparency of his skin. He looked like a wax figure with attenuated veins ill drawn on the surface in burnt umber.

He was not expecting Mr. Jellybond Tinney, and the surprise of his arrival roused him somewhat. There had been a smouldering feud between them, because Montacute resented Mr. Jellybond Tinney's influence over his mother, and was always on the watch to prevent him taking too much upon himself; but away from home that feeling was in abeyance, and he was glad to see him.

The first glance had satisfied Mr. Jellybond Tinney that there was ground for alarm, but no one would have suspected it from his manner.

"I'm up in town for a few days," he said, "and just came in to say 'How do you do?' By-the-way, how *do* you do? As a rule, when people come to ask us that question, in that sort of way, they don't wait for an answer. Is that an interesting book you have there?"

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"It's Virgil," said Montacute.

"In the Greek, I suppose," said Mr. Jellybond Tinney, blinking.

Montacute looked at him for a moment in uncertainty. Then it dawned upon him that old Jellybond had given himself away, and sudden seriousness descended like a mask upon his countenance.

"I'm fond of the classics myself, but not in the original," Mr. Jellybond pursued, disarming adverse criticism by frank confession, as was his wont. "I never mastered dead languages; I never had the chance. By-the-way, now that I come to look at you, you don't seem very fit."

"I'm not quite fit," said Montacute.

"Been working too hard, I suppose. Why not come down home for a change?"

"I had not thought of it."

"Well, think of it now, and come back with me."

"I can't be bothered."

Mr. Jellybond Tinney was baffled.

"It would do your mother good," he ventured.

Montacute ignored the suggestion.

Then there was a pause.

"No, you certainly are not looking well," Mr. Jellybond began again, at last. "You've not half flesh enough on your bones for your height. You want fresh air and feeding up."

"I'm sick of food," said Montacute. "They're always cramming me here, from morning to night."

"They don't cram you with fresh air, I'll bet," said Mr. Jellybond. "You'd better let me persuade you to come back with me."

Montacute turned to the window and looked out for a little. He was beginning to waver.

"There'd be such a fuss," he objected. "My mother would think I was going to die, and Mr. Stephens

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wouldn't like it, just at the beginning of the term. I'm his pet pupil—quite the hope of the house, you see.”

Mr. Stephens entered opportunely in time to hear this last remark.

“What's that you're saying?” he asked.

“I say you wouldn't like it if I went home for a change just now,” Montacute answered. “Mr. Jellybond Tinney says I'm not looking fit, and wants me to go back with him.”

“I would if I were you,” said Mr. Stephens. “You've overgrown your strength, and London is not the place to recoup. The air is too vitiated.”

Montacute, looking from one to the other, saw signs of conspiracy in their impassive faces; but he was seized upon by the cruel reserve which besets the young when they suffer, and could not bring himself to ask a question.

“Will you come?” said Mr. Jellybond.

“I suppose so,” he answered, apathetically.

“It would be as well to see a doctor, perhaps, before you leave town,” Mr. Jellybond said, casually, “just to ask if you'd better have a tonic or something.”

“I suppose so,” Montacute reiterated.

The doctor was bland and vague. When he had examined Montacute he took Mr. Jellybond aside and generalized delightfully on the subject of atrophy, its cause and cure, for half an hour, then, concerning Montacute, gave it as his opinion that “with care, of course; but he'd better come and see me again in a few weeks.”

After that Mr. Jellybond Tinney became nervously anxious to get the boy home. The bustle and preparation for his departure, however, had set up a reaction from the state of apathy in which Mr. Jellybond had found him, and he began to be difficult to manage.

“Look here, Mr. Jellybond,” he said, “I'm going

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over to stay with you at your hotel. I want to see a little life before I leave London. You know the ropes. I want you to show me about. I'm over eighteen, and the Zoological Gardens have ceased to satisfy me as a preparatory school for the business of life. Take me into the human hive, and let me see the machinery, the drones and the workers, the good and the bad. If I begin to go about on my own account I may come to grief ; but I shall be all right with you to show me the way."

Mr. Jellybond Tinney positively declined.

"Don't ask me to take you anywhere until you're in better health," he said. "You'd not be able to hold your own in a row or anything at present. And it isn't worth your while to come to the hotel for one night."

"You funk the responsibility," said Montacute.

"I do."

Nevertheless, he found himself obliged to accede to Montacute's desire to join him at his hotel. It was, in fact, more of a command than a request, for Montacute was well supplied with money, and could do as he pleased.

They dined together that evening, and immediately after dinner Montacute took himself off to bed. Mr. Jellybond saw him depart with a sigh of relief. His responsibility was over for that day, at least. He was still by way of defying the cards, but was uneasy all the same. The prediction that the boy's death would lie at his door tormented him. If fate could be foiled by precaution it should be ; but what he feared was that fate meant to play him one of her scurvy tricks—that somehow, in spite of him, Birnam Wood would be brought to Dunsinane.

The next morning, when he was dressed, he went to Montacute's room to see if he were ready for breakfast, and found him still in bed.

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"I'm not going to get up," Montacute said. "I'm tired and mean to rest and read a novel. Send me up a good breakfast."

"I'll send for the doctor also," said Mr. Jellybond.

"Doctor! Rot!" said Montacute. "Look at me! I'm a lot better than I was yesterday. But I'm lazy, and I won't move till I think fit."

"But the train goes—"

"Confound the train!" said Montacute. "You just wash your hands of the responsibility. I'm not your baby boy. Send me some breakfast, there's a good fellow, do; and leave me alone in peace with *The Woman in White*."

He grinned up uncannily at Mr. Jellybond as he spoke, and there appeared in his face for a moment a singular resemblance to Babs. Now, Mr. Jellybond Tinney knew Babs well, and when he saw that look in her brother's face he scented trouble. He knew that there was no arguing with Babs in an obstinate mood, and foresaw that it might be the same with her brother, for all his illness and apathy.

Montacute came down in the afternoon and took command of the party.

"It's too late to go home to-day," he said. "Let's go for an airing. It'll buck us up a bit. I'm very sorry Babs is in Paris. If she'd been here we'd have taken her too. Babs is always good company."

In the evening, directly after dinner, Montacute again retired; and again next morning he would not get up.

This continued for many days. Mr. Jellybond Tinney sent cheerful reports to Mrs. Kingconstance; but he was at his wits' end. He had not anticipated any trouble at all with Montacute; but it seemed as if the boy had suddenly become a man on his hands, and a headstrong man to boot. Mr. Montacute quite appreciated the difference of position between them, and skil-

fully used the ease and grace of bearing that was his by right of birth and breeding to keep Mr. Jellybond Tinney in his proper place. Race tells. In such encounters between plebeian and aristocrat the plebeian, however great his superiority as a man of character and of ability, has little chance. The hereditary habits of command and of obedience are inveterate. In social matters, where the two meet on equal terms, the child of birth takes the lead as by right, and the child of the people follows as of necessity. To Montacute's suave announcement of his intentions Mr. Jellybond Tinney had nothing more forcible to oppose than ineffectual remonstrance. The charming letters he wrote to Mrs. Kingconstance during this time fanned the flame of her impatience to see him again ; but Montacute also wrote. He told his mother that he was doing well in London, an assertion that Mr. Jellybond Tinney, in view of Montacute's regular habits and moderation, could not refute, and demanding time and money to complete the cure—neither of which could his mother deny him for such a purpose, chafe as she might at the delay.

Mr. Jellybond also chafed sorely at first ; but by degrees the apprehensions which were at the bottom of his uneasiness subsided, and his knack of making the best of everything came into play. He was in comfortable quarters. Montacute went to bed every night directly after dinner, but during the time that they were together Mr. Jellybond found him excellent company, and was beguiled into talking to him as to another man of the world. Left alone after dinner, with Montacute upstairs safe in bed, Mr. Jellybond Tinney adorned himself with an Inverness cloak and sallied forth jauntily with his opera-hat under his arm. Obsequious hotel lackeys ran down the steps to call up a hansom for him, and he enjoyed their zealous service. His air was quite "doggie"; one would have said a well-preserved elderly

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man rakishly bent on making the most, in an undesirable manner, of such flashes of youthful feeling as still remained to him. But night after night the hotel porter who shut the doors of his hansom upon him received the same order for the driver, "House of Commons," delivered with the casual air of a man who is following an accustomed pursuit; and night after night was spent by Mr. Jellybond Tinney, thanks to the influence of his county friends, with distinguished strangers in the foremost row, studying Parliamentary procedure with the intentness of a practical man who means business.

Meanwhile the weather had changed. The autumn swept itself away. The equinoctial gales set in betimes, the temperature went down, and the Inverness cloak, which had been adopted as an ornament, became a necessity.

At last one day, on his return, shivering in the early hours of the morning from an all-night sitting, Mr. Jellybond Tinney noticed as he passed Montacute's room that the door was open. The fact did not strike him particularly until he began to undress, but then, all at once, for no reason that he could have given, he was seized upon by an importunate impulse to go and see—what? He did not know, and before he could ask himself he was out in the passage.

Montacute's door was certainly ajar. The stupid old riddle recurred to him, but he found no suggestion in it. He listened. There was no sound. Evidently Montacute was not ill. He must either be awake or in a very deep sleep. Mr. Jellybond Tinney thought he would have a look at him just to make sure. Very softly he pushed the door open. The gray dawn lighted the room. Mr. Jellybond Tinney peeped round the curtain at the bed. It was empty. Moreover, it had not been slept in at all that night. Mr. Jellybond stood transfixed.

"Hullo!" said a cheery voice behind him. "Found

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me out, eh? Been given away for once? Well, don't look glum, old chap. It's all right. Boys will be boys, you know—at nineteen. I say, get me some soda-water—I'm parched."

"You young scamp!" Mr. Jellybond exclaimed. "And I'm responsible for you! You'll come back with me to-day, or my name's not Tinney."

"Well, it's about time," said Montacute, yawning effusively. "I'm pretty well done. Just give me a few hours' sleep—and the soda-water an' ye love me. I say"—confidentially—"you'd better have taken my advice and shown me the ropes. It would have been safer. But, anyhow, I've had a rattling good time." He turned his trousers pockets inside out. "Stony broke, and in debt," he pursued. "You'll have to settle the bill and pay for the carriage of me home."

Mr. Jellybond Tinney waited impatiently until the telegraph offices were open, and then, in his haste to be rid of the responsibility, he telegraphed to Dane Court for a carriage to meet them on the arrival of the express that evening.

Montacute, looking like a dissipated ghost in a riotous mood, appeared in time for a late breakfast. He entertained Mr. Jellybond Tinney with a shameless account of his adventures.

"You've been trying to kill yourself, it seems," that gentleman said, grimly.

"Not a bit of it—done me good," Montacute rejoined; "and, at any rate, nobody could blame you if I had killed myself. I don't suppose you would be expected to tuck me up in bed every night and lock the door."

Mr. Jellybond had had the same thought in his own mind all the morning, and the expression of it carried conviction home.

"A few more hours and you'll be off my hands," he exclaimed.

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"Thank goodness, eh?" said Montacute, with an uncanny grin. "Now be sociable."

"You're becoming very like your sister," Mr. Jellybond said.

"Babs? Yes, I see it myself. When my spirits are up I'm like Babs in character, or at least I should be, very, if I had her vitality."

He sighed.

"Oh, you'll gain in vitality as you go on," Mr. Jellybond hastened to assure him; "but no more of this"—and he waved his hand significantly towards the great, wicked city.

They had the Pullman car to themselves on the way down, and as they dashed along, express, Mr. Jellybond Tinney found his equanimity restored. Montacute told him a story which was quite unfit for publication, and that drew from him another and another, with some witticisms interspersed; and having once started they kept the ball rolling between them until the train itself seemed to rock with ribald mirth.

But Mr. Jellybond Tinney pulled himself up at last, in view of his companion's youth, and pointed a tardy moral by asserting that all that sort of thing was truly objectionable, although undeniably funny.

"We can't always be on our best behavior, I allow," he said; "and it is not our occasional lapses, but our habitual indulgences, that brand us. But you take it from me, my boy, for I know what I am talking about. I've seen many a boy of property and promise like you come to grief, more's the pity, after just such a start as you've been making. Enjoy as you go along, but go gently. Enjoy in moderation, if you would enjoy thoroughly; and don't you be such a fool as to believe it, no matter who will have it so—immoral pleasures are not the finest form of entertainment by any means."

They pulled up at the station. A bitter wind swept

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the platform. The rain was falling in torrents. Mr. Jellybond huddled Montacute into his top-coat.

"Quick to the carriage," he said.

They dashed out. There was no carriage there.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney, in his haste, had put nothing but "Danehurst" on his telegram, and it had gone to every other Danehurst in the country before it reached the right one.

There was no cab either, or vehicle of any kind, and the rain was descending in torrents and the wind blowing icy cold.

"Here's a jolly deluge," said Montacute, rolling up his trousers.

"What are you doing?" said Mr. Jellybond Tinney, sharply.

"I'm just going to dash across to 'The Flag of My Country' and see if they can fish us out any sort of a trap."

"We'd better stay and sleep there," Mr. Jellybond advised.

"Not me," said Montacute. "I mean to be tucked up in my own little bed to-night by my mammy."

"But a seventeen-mile drive in a shandrydan in such a storm's enough to kill the pair of us."

"Rot!" said Montacute.

"You wait here, at all events, and let me go and see about the trap."

But Montacute dashed out into the rain unheeding, and there was nothing for it but to follow him; which Mr. Jellybond did, shivering with horrible misgivings.

CHAPTER XXX

WHEN we expect something disastrous we generally keep in reserve the hope that it will not happen because we expect it, thereby proving our faith in the fallacy that it is always the unexpected that happens. This is what Mr. Jellybond Tinney did during the first few feverish days after Montacute's return. He tried to flatter himself that it was not the expected which would happen because it was expected, and that therefore the law of the unexpected must intervene. He did not perceive that as soon as the unexpected is expected it ceases to be unexpected.

On his arrival at Dane Court Montacute had promptly taken to his bed, and had remained there ; and, although he was only said to be suffering from a chill, everybody was anxious except his mother.

"Cute always has a chill at this time of the year," she observed, complacently. She seemed to think that there was safety in the punctual recurrence of the evil. "This is rather a worse one than usual, but he'll get over it all right," she added, comfortably. "And probably it will do him good. When people have rather a bad illness, people who have been ailing, it clears off a whole lot of small evils in its train. The doctor attends to them then. He won't take the trouble when there's nothing much the matter."

These fluent platitudes were addressed to Mr. Jellybond Tinney. They were in her sitting-room alone to-

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gether, the doctor having just left them after the second visit to Montacute that day, and Mr. Jellybond Tinney was looking exceedingly grave. To see the two together one would have supposed that he was the anxious parent and Mrs. Kingconstance his friendly consoler.

"You can't think that anything's going to happen to him," she went on, "after all the trouble of getting him home, and this delightful change in the weather, too? Why, I dressed with all my windows open this morning, it was so fine."

"You could not have had your windows open the night of our arrival," said Mr. Jellybond Tinney, gloomily. "I cannot help blaming myself, and yet I don't know how I could have helped it, unless I had put him in irons. That boy's the very"—devil he had been going to say, but he checked himself in time, and concluded, lamely—"is very difficult to manage."

"My children all have a very great deal of character," said Mrs. Kingconstance.

Mr. Jellybond, who had been walking up and down the room, stopped short.

"I suppose you will send for Babs," he said.

"Oh no! Why should I?" Mrs. Kingconstance asked. "All the way from Paris—just think! And she is doing so well there. Babs has never been so satisfactory in her life. You surely would not advise me to send for her now. It would only unsettle her."

"I should," said Mr. Jellybond Tinney, emphatically.

"But why?"

Mr. Jellybond Tinney walked up and down again. What should he say? How could he tell a mother that she had better send for her daughter because her son was going to die? And would it not be just as bad to suggest that if anything happened to Montacute and Babs

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were not sent for in time she would never forgive her mother ?

" Why ?" Mrs. Kingconstance repeated.

" It would be better, I think," he answered, with much hesitation. " If Montacute has a serious illness and Babs is not sent for she will—er—not be pleased."

" Really, my *good* friend," said Mrs. Kingconstance, " is that a reason ? Babs will not be pleased, indeed ! Why, didn't you yourself persuade me to send Babs to school to cure her of thinking of nothing but her own pleasure ? If she comes home now she will encourage Montacute to do everything that he ought not to do, and we shall have no end of trouble—"

She stopped short with her mouth still open, as in the act of speaking, and stared in astonishment at Mr. Jellybond Tinney. For he, victim of the force of habit, catching a glimpse of himself in the long mirror on the wall at the end of the room, lost consciousness of his surroundings, checked himself in his anxious promenade, went up to the mirror and began to dance, his countenance grimly set the while, and danced till his coat-tails flew—as was his wont on grave occasions when alone.

Mrs. Kingconstance's astonishment changed to alarm. She sat staring at him, horribly fascinated, unable to speak or move.

Becoming suddenly aware of what he was doing, he pulled himself up, stood a moment facing himself with eyes of reproach in the mirror, and then slowly turned to her.

Both were overcome—he with the sense of having lost his dignity irretrievably, she with the fear that he had gone mad.

Mrs. Kingconstance was the first to recover.

" Well, Mr. Jellybond Tinney !" she exclaimed ; " may I ask for an explanation ?"



" SHE SAT STARING AT HIM, HORRIBLY FASCINATED "

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He took out his pocket-handkerchief and mopped his forehead.

"It is a way I have," he said, simply. "When in doubt I dance; when in a difficulty I tell the truth. I apologize."

"There is no need to apologize," said Mrs. Kingconstance, falling back upon convention. "But I was certainly surprised. I didn't know you could dance. Will you—er—do it again?"

"I couldn't, to save my life!" he said, sincerely.

Great drops of perspiration came out on his forehead at the bare suggestion. It was bad enough to have made a fool of himself involuntarily; was it likely that he would commit himself again to order?

In the evening, when the doctor came to see Montacute for the third time that day, feeling began to run high in the servants' hall, and comments were made unrestrainedly. A sense of something tragic impending had seized upon the household; and the half-light of ignorance by which the drama was viewed from down-stairs cast curious distortions upon the actors and their motives. The upper servants sat long at table that evening. Little was being said; but it was evident from the expression of each face that the minds of all were occupied with a subject of uncommon gravity.

Benson, the butler, was the most moved, apparently, as was natural, considering that he had seen the children grow up from their cradles and understood their dispositions better than their own mother did. Mrs. Kingconstance valued Benson extremely as an ornament to her establishment. The prejudices of the county families had acted upon his mind and reacted on his appearance so emphatically that he might easily have passed for a county gentleman himself until he spoke. But he deserved her esteem on higher grounds than those, he being entirely devoted to her interests.

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He sat now balancing a large dinner-knife, which, being loose in its haft, emitted a sharp "ping!" every time he allowed it to touch the table; and this sound was the signal for him to shake his head solemnly.

"I sawr 'e 'ad that cold on 'im as soon as ever 'e got 'ere," he remarked, at last; "and it's my opinion that that there Jellybond Tinney's as much to blame fur bringin' of 'im back as 'e were fur gettin' on 'im sent away. That's *my* opinion. You can accept it or not, as you choose, ladies *and* gentlemen."

They accepted it, one and all, with various signs of approval.

"You've 'it the right nail on the 'ead this time, Mr. Benson," Clodd observed.

Clodd had worked himself into the house as second footman without Mr. Jellybond's assistance, and the civilizing influence of domestication was already apparent in his manners, and had also had a humanizing effect upon his countenance. His wide mouth had been contracted by increased decision of character and self-respect, so that his eyes looked larger and his nose more prominent; in expression, too, his face was greatly improved, cunning having given place to intelligence. The indirect cause of the improvement, for he received no encouragement, was Bertha, the young lady's-maid. Clodd had fallen in love with Bertha. His devotion was of the chivalrous, respectful kind which impels men to become worthy of the object of their admiration—the kind that women most appreciate when they understand it. The constant effort to understand Bertha, to feel in himself what he saw in her—that absence of evil thought, or of anything worse in her mind than fun and mischief, which made her so good to look upon—had been a polishing process to Clodd.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney, being in ill odor with the servants down-stairs just then, by reason of a suspicion of

his design to become master of the house which had recently got about, was naturally blamed for everything untoward that happened. Bertha was particularly hard on him. She was sore because the special attentions with which he had flattered her vanity in the early days of their acquaintance had ceased when he became serious in his designs upon Mrs. Kingconstance. He was too wary a gentleman to trouble himself about smaller fry by the way when it was big game that he was after.

It was Bertha who next broke the silence.

"I'm sure it's that Jellybond Tinney's doings that Miss Lorraine's not been sent for," she burst out. "I believe she's never been told he was ill even—and he's dying to see her, and always asking when she'll be here. Oh, it's a shame! I've a good mind to write and tell her myself!"

"Yes, it's all that Jellybond, you may be sure," Benson agreed, with a smack of disgust, like a man who has swallowed a fly inadvertently.

Clodd shook his head and pursed up his mouth.

"I'd like to see him kicked," Bertha declared, slapping the palm of one hand with the other vehemently.

"Sooner or later," Clodd said, impressively, "that man will be cir-cum-wented by I know who, you bet."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE outcome of the colloquy among the servants was an alarming letter from Bertha to Babs. When she received it Babs was idling in the salon, whither she had been sent to practise her singing-lesson. She had a lovely voice, and one of the best singing-masters of Paris was directing its cultivation. The school experiment had answered admirably for Babs, thanks to the good lady with whom she was placed. Provided you kept her amused, Babs was teachable; but instruction had to be administered to her on the kindergarten system, with toys and games and songs and dances. It was by object-lessons that she profited most. Still, in the two years that she had been in Paris she had learned much and improved in many ways. Of the world she knew no more than a babe. That was not her fault, however, but the defect of her education. She would easily have acquired wisdom and self-reliance in all those matters in which wisdom and self-reliance alone are of avail had not all the necessary information been scrupulously withheld from her. At seventeen Babs was armed, as most young ladies are, with scraps of every sort of knowledge except that knowledge of herself which would have been most precious to her in a world of wolves in sheep's clothing. Of her own nature, and of the dangers to which she was exposed by reason of her natural instincts, Babs knew nothing and suspected nothing.

She happened to be thinking of Montacute when Ber-

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tha's letter was brought to her. She had heard from her mother during the week ; but Mrs. Kingconstance had merely mentioned casually that Cute was out of sorts and had come home for a week ; and Babs had thought less of his being " out of sorts " than of the fact that he was at home and she was not there to enjoy the occasion. The news that he was seriously ill served to change her vague desire into a positive determination. She went to Madame Robert with Bertha's letter in her hand, and said she must go home at once. Madame Robert replied that that was impossible ; she could not act upon information received from a servant ; if her presence at home were necessary, doubtless she would be sent for, and in any case she could not travel alone.

Babs had been inclined to argue the point, but that last assertion suggested an idea which it would have been futile to discuss. She therefore said not another word, but went back to her singing with the air of one convinced.

" How docile that child has become," Madame Robert remarked to mademoiselle, her second in command. " Really, she is very much improved."

" Thanks to you, dear madame, she has become a very sweet creature," mademoiselle rejoined.

She ought to have been superintending Babs's singing-lesson in the salon, but forgot her duty in the interest of this little discussion, and went off afterwards to see about something else. So it happened that Babs found herself alone for once with her music master, and made the most of the opportunity.

Monsieur Bonane, known to the girls among themselves as Alphonse, was a youngish man whose meals were so amply blessed to him that it was impossible to look at him, even casually, without being struck by the fact that he was extremely well nourished.

He was as sentimental as a schoolgirl and as sensual

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as a monkey. He prided himself upon being unable to refuse a pretty woman anything ; his courtesies to the plain are not recorded. His coarse black hair stood up stiffly all over his bullet head like the bristles on a blacking-brush, and his mustache was crisply frizzled and flattened out overnight against each cheek by means of a little machine made for the purpose. He prided himself upon dressing like an Englishman, and had appeared on that occasion in a morning suit of pale gray, with a white silk tie, and a pelargonium in his button-hole. Two fingers and a thumb of his short, fat, pudgy right hand were stained brown at the tips from cigarette smoking. Babs's particular aversion were his hands and that horrid brown stain. There was an exaggerated and fawning deference in his manner to her which would have suggested anything but respect to a more experienced person ; and even Babs felt that upon the very least encouragement he would have become familiar. He was making a large income by training singers for the stage. To find good voices to cultivate was the great object of his life ; and his dream had always been to discover a girl, gloriously gifted, who would take the world by storm with his help, while he would go about with her everywhere, dazzling the jealously admiring eyes of all mankind, as her acknowledged lover. In the charming English Miss Kingconstance he had found the ideal of this dream ; but, alas ! because of the presence of mademoiselle at the lessons he had never once had an opportunity of telling her of the radiant possibilities which were hers—until that morning.

At first he did not realize that they were to be left alone together, and when he did he was almost too nervous to take advantage of the rare opportunity. But Babs helped to restore his confidence. To her he was nothing but a horrid little, fat, overdressed Frenchman, of no account at all except to teach her singing, or to be made

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use of in any other way that might suit her convenience, while being rigorously kept in his place.

"Mademoiselle is not attending to her lesson this morning," he said.

"No, I'm not. I'm bothered," said Babs.

"Oh, surely not!" he exclaimed. "One like you should be shielded from all earthly trouble."

"That wouldn't be exactly strengthening to my character," said Babs, with a flash of common-sense; "and, at any rate, I shouldn't care to be a sugar-plum in a bonbon box."

"Ah! *Mademoiselle a de l'esprit!*" he ejaculated, with a full-blown sigh. "She is gifted beyond the measure of mortals."

"How?" said Babs.

"That voice!"

He turned the palms of his hands outward and gazed up at the ceiling.

"My voice is good, you think?"

"It is magnificent! You have only to appear to win the applause of crowned heads."

"What! use my voice to sing in public—become a professional? How horrid!" said Babs.

He gazed at her in amazement.

"But, mademoiselle, consider," he exclaimed. "The admiration! the bouquets! the diamonds! the *crowned heads!*"

"Oh, I shall have admiration and bouquets and diamonds enough without troubling myself," she answered, casually. "Those are my birthrights. And as to the crowned heads, will you kindly name one in Europe at the present moment that is worth looking at? If you will, I should like to go and see it, for it must certainly be the rarest thing upon earth."

Monsieur Bonane sat speechless.

"But fame—glory!" he finally gasped, gazing up to

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her from the piano-stool in positive awe of the wealth of nature which could dispense with all that so many others were imploring the gods on their bended knees day and night to vouchsafe them.

"Look at me, my dear sir," said Babs, striking an attitude; "and listen to me when I sing! The world is mine, I tell you, by right. I shall find it at my feet when I want it there. Sing in public—make an exhibition, a servant of myself to *that*"—she waved her hands towards the people passing in the street—"be paid to amuse them, be fearful of their displeasure and grateful for their applause—do you call that glory? I don't."

"But—you are magnificent!" he cried. "I could adore you on my bended knees."

"Down on your bended knees, then, and adore me," said Babs.

He took her at her word. She burst out laughing and walked to the window, leaving him still on his knees by the piano, a little, fat figure of fun.

When he had gathered himself up she sauntered back to him.

"Look here, monsieur," she said, confidentially. "I can see you are a man to be trusted. Will you do something for me?"

He had looked considerably crestfallen and foolish upon the failure of that last little theatrical display; but now his countenance cleared.

"I am in a difficulty," Babs proceeded—"a very common kind of difficulty. I want money."

"How much?" he cried, tearing a bulging pocket-book from the breast-pocket of his coat.

"The value of this little brooch would do," she replied, taking off a pretty diamond ornament she wore—"at least I think so. What do you suppose it is worth—two hundred francs?"

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He looked at it and laughed.

"Nearer two thousand, I should say, mademoiselle," he assured her.

"I don't even want one thousand," she rejoined. "I only just want to raise enough on it for my present purpose; and I shall want the brooch back when I repay the money."

"Mademoiselle will allow me the honor of lending her the money without any security, I hope," he said, opening the pocket-book and holding it out to her. "She can pay the debt when it suits her convenience."

"You are very kind," said Babs, "but I would rather you took the brooch by way of security, lest anything should happen to me in the meantime."

"Mademoiselle, I could not," he protested. "If mademoiselle would give me some other little thing—a trifle to serve as keepsake—"

A footstep was heard outside in the hall.

Babs hastily tore off a little ring she wore and put it in his hand. As hastily he abstracted a note from his pocket-book, folded it, gave it to her—then hopped onto the music-stool.

The door opened—the much-flustered second in command came hurrying in.

"You must dwell on that note *fortissimo*," Monsieur Bonane was saying, excitedly.

He jumped up to make his bow to mademoiselle, flopped down again, and continued.

Babs took the note with precision and held it true, fastening her brooch at the same time, then putting what might have been her handkerchief into her pocket, in the casual way habitual to her.

The second in command sat down with a sigh of relief, inwardly congratulating herself on the supposition that at all events no harm had been done by her untimely forgetfulness.

CHAPTER XXXI

NEXT morning the boat express was just about to leave the Gare du Nord. All the bustle was over, the last of the luggage was being put in, the passengers had taken their seats and were settling themselves for the journey. One gentleman in particular was congratulating himself upon having secured an empty carriage. He had arranged his numerous packages, put on his travelling-cap, and was opening his newspaper when the signal was given for the train to start.

But just at that moment there arose a hubbub on the platform—shouts—then a sound like the rush of wings. The solitary passenger listened without looking up. The train was moving, but the door was torn open, a bag was thrown into the carriage, and Babs tumbled in after it headlong with much sith of invisible silk. An official banged to the door and they were off.

Babs leaned forward anxiously until the train had glided out of the station. Then she threw herself back on her seat.

"That's all right!" she exclaimed.

Looking round, she met the eyes of her fellow-traveller fixed upon her with an amused expression.

"Did I speak?" she asked.

"You did," he answered.

"How stupid of me! But I meant it. Thank goodness, I'm off! There's nothing to be afraid of now."

"You're not afraid of me, then?" he asked, tentatively.

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Babs looked at him with wide-open, innocent eyes inquiringly.

"You're not my natural enemy, are you?" she asked. "But if you are, at any rate you're the only one."

"My dear child," he said, gravely, "you ought to know that, under the circumstances, in the multitude of enemies there is safety."

Babs reflected a moment.

"That's too subtle for me," she said. "I don't see it."

"Then all the more reason that you should not be travelling alone with no one to look after you."

"You can look after me if you like," said Babs, smiling irresistibly. "I like your face; I'm sure you're nice."

"Thank you," he said, responding to the smile.

He was a good-looking man of a refined type, tall and slight, verging on forty-five, with a sprinkling of gray in his hair, and a slight, dark mustache. Everything about him—hands, feet, and features, the way he was dressed, and the cultivated tone of his voice—bespoke gentleness. One would have said an Englishman of the best sort. His voice was particularly agreeable. When he smiled there was a gleam of good teeth, and his face, which, in repose, was somewhat melancholy, broke into happy lines.

"You don't look upon every strange man you meet as a natural enemy, then?" he said

"No," she answered, "why should I? I should be more inclined to look upon every man I meet as a natural protector, I think—unless, of course, his appearance was very forbidding."

"But supposing you had jumped into the carriage with a very forbidding man—or even with one who was inclined to be familiar—what would you have done?"

"Oh, I should have turned my back on him and looked out of the window."

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"But supposing he had persisted?"

"I should have requested him not to."

"But if he had put his arm around you?"

"He would never have dared to do *that*!" said Babs, flushing angrily. "How can you suggest such a thing?"

"Because there is an extreme probability of such a thing happening under the circumstances; and I tell you so frankly, to make you realize the risk you are running. You ought not to be travelling alone."

"But if I have no one to travel with?" she said, beginning to put on a new pair of gloves.

He had noticed the costly simplicity of everything she wore, the rustle of unseen silk when she moved, the scented leather of her dressing-bag; and these things, with her manner, which was a compound of childish diffidence and easy assurance, the manner of a young girl ignorant of the world and accustomed to be considered, easily enabled him to place her.

"I cannot think that you have no one to travel with," he said.

"Bother!" said Babs, letting a handful of money fall on her lap in her struggles with her gloves. "Alphonse must have lent me a king's ransom. Just look at the change! I wonder how much he gave me? I never looked at the note. How *am* I to tell? I shall have to return it to him."

"If you count the change, and add the railway fare, you'll arrive at the amount," her companion suggested.

"I don't know how to count change; would you mind doing it for me?" said Babs, handing him the money.

"I shouldn't like to owe that little beast a sou."

"Who is the little beast, may I ask?"

"Oh, my singing-master. I had no money for the journey, so I got him to lend me some."

Her companion finished counting the money before he replied.

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"Your music-master lent you a thousand francs," he said, looking very grave.

"How ridiculous!" Babs exclaimed. "I only just wanted enough for the journey."

"You must be on very good terms with your singing-master."

"Oh yes, of course," said Babs. "He gives me three lessons a week. I never spoke to him before, though, about anything but music. I never had a chance until yesterday—I never wanted to, either. But yesterday mademoiselle, who ought always to be in the room when I'm taking my lesson, forgot to come. Then it occurred to me that I might get the money for the journey out of Alphonse."

"Then you are running away from school?"

"Not exactly," said Babs. "I am just going home without leave to see how my brother is—my only brother. I heard he was seriously ill, and they wouldn't let me go. We're great chums, Cute and I, and he's very delicate. What would you have done if you were me?"

There was pathetic inquiry in her eyes as she looked at him, and he thought to himself, "What an angelic face!"

"It is hard for me to say, not knowing all the circumstances," he answered, gently.

"I don't know how it is," said Babs, looking at him earnestly. "I've just met you—I ought not to care—and yet I don't want you to blame me. You have been blaming me, I feel, ever since I tumbled into your carriage. Is it because you would rather be alone?"

"No," he hastened to assure her. "And I am not blaming you. I am only trying to make you understand that you are doing a dangerous thing. I blame your friends for not enlightening you. If you had had any idea of the risk I feel sure that you would not have run it. It is monstrous that a girl of your age should

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be left to face the dangers of such a position with the ignorant confidence of a child."

Babs looked at him vaguely, not at all understanding; but she scented something unpleasant, and sought instinctively to change the subject.

"Well, I'm not likely to have to run away again," she said; "but if I do"—she broke into a smile—"I'll get you to run away with me. Now let us talk about something pleasant. I do love to talk. There is nothing so delightful as conversation, is there? Do I bore you with my chatter? But even if I do, bear with me, because it won't be for long. We shall part presently and never meet again."

"Why should we never meet again?"

"Oh, people who meet like this never do, do they? I don't know who you are, and you don't know who I am, and we never shall know."

The train began to slow down.

"This is Amiens, I think," he said. "We shall have twenty minutes here. You must come to the buffet."

"No, thank you," said Babs.

"I'm very sorry," he insisted; "but you must—unless you mean to condemn me to go without breakfast. I cannot let you out of my sight until I deliver you safely into the custody of your friends."

"Now that's the sort of thing I like," said Babs, beaming. "I like a man to take the ordering of me—the good ordering, of course. Do you know what I mean? I like a man who knows what to do himself, knows the right thing, and knows what I ought to do, and just tells me to do it. But I'm afraid if you carry out your determination to see me safe home it will take you a good deal out of your way. It's just the kind of thing Cadenhouse would have done."

"Cadenhouse?" her companion echoed.

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"Yes—Lord Cadenhuse. Do you know him?" said Babs.

"Well! We were near neighbors as boys, and went to the same school."

"Are you Jeffrey Wylde?" Babs exclaimed.

"No."

"Who then?" she wondered, her thoughts running rapidly over every likely absentee in the neighborhood. "Mrs. Normanton has a brother abroad—Sir Owen St. Lambert."

"At your service," said her companion, bowing.

"How exciting!" said Babs. "You must often have been at my house—Dane Court."

"You are one of the Kingconstances, then," he said.

"Yes—Lorraine."

"No, surely. Lorraine is much older."

"Oh, I'm the niece, not the aunt; I'm Babs."

He laughed.

"I know you quite well by name," he said. "I think I must have seen you the last time I was at Normanton, some years ago now—at all events, I heard of you. So you are still living up to your early reputation, Babs," he admonished her. "You must really reform."

"With your good help," she said. "Are you coming to Normanton now?"

"Yes."

"It seems to be quite in the natural order of events that you should befriend me," she said. "We haven't stopped, it seems."

"No, but we can't be far from Amiens, and the first thing to be done when we get there is to telegraph to your friends, to relieve their minds."

"*'On my way home. Quite safe. Travelling with General St. Lambert.—BABS,'*" she rattled off, glibly.

"Or words to that effect," he said, smiling. "You will have a bad half-hour when you arrive, I expect."

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Babs fixed her eyes on futurity and looked grave for a moment ; then she laughed.

" You must come and see," she said—" indeed you must. I won't go home alone. Come and see me take the dilemma by the horns. Do you know my mother ?"

" Yes. We met frequently in days gone by."

" Then you can imagine what the scene will be."

" On the contrary," he answered, " I am quite at a loss."

Babs grinned.

The rest of the journey passed without incident ; but the recollection of it remained with Babs, a tender, happy memory always. She just resigned herself to her companion's guiding, and let him make things pleasant for her. She was conscious of his eyes often upon her ; she appreciated his constant, unobtrusive, delicate attentions ; she found herself at her best with him ; she felt herself very much in love. The people we love soonest are always those with whom we find ourselves at our best.

When they arrived at Dane Court, General St. Lambert was much the more nervous of the two. For one thing, knowing the dangers of such an escapade, he took a much more serious view of it than Babs did.

Since the first telegram had arrived from Paris announcing the disappearance of Babs, and the second from St. Lambert assuring her mother of her safety, Mrs. Kingconstance had worked herself into what was, for her, quite a fury. Her sister-in-law, Mr. Jellybond Tinney, and Mr. Worringham had done their best to soothe her ; but for once she was thoroughly determined to deal severely with Babs for her misconduct, and in order to keep herself in that mood she refused sweetbread for luncheon, and would not hear of *pâté-de-foie-gras* sandwiches for tea. This self-denial was of little avail, however, owing to Babs's habit of taking the initiative herself in times of trouble.

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She burst in upon the party at Dane Court, attended by a distinguished-looking gentleman, just when she was least expected.

"Well, mamma!" she exclaimed—"well, mamma, this is a nice way to treat me! My only brother seriously ill, and there was I left in Paris without a word! Why, I actually had to borrow money from my singing-master—from a wretched little French worm with a blacking-brush head—to bring me home! That was a nice thing for a Miss Kingconstance to have to do! And I should have had to travel the whole way alone if it had not been for Sir Owen St. Lambert—an utter stranger. But really it seems that a stranger one picks up on a railway journey is kinder and more considerate than one's own family."

Mrs. Kingconstance was dumfounded. She held out her hand to St. Lambert, but for a moment she could not speak.

"I don't know what to say!" she exclaimed, at last, looking helplessly round at her little court.

"I should say all's well that ends well," Sir Owen ventured.

"But is this the end?" Mrs. Kingconstance lamented. "There seems to be no end with Babs. She's always doing something."

"Well, mamma, I ask you," said Babs, "what would you have done in my position if your mother had treated you so badly? I bet you would have run away too. I *had* to run away; there was nothing else to be done. It was the lesser of two evils. If I had stayed there eating my heart out with anxiety I should have had consumption or brain fever, or something. Heroines always do if they don't run away."

"Whose heroine are you?" her aunt asked, smiling.

"I'm my own heroine, of course. How are you, auntie?"

Babs went up to her and kissed her, then shook hands with both the vicar and Mr. Jellybond Tinney.

"Come now, I ask you all," she said, "is there any use prolonging this scene? The long and the short of it is, mamma did not send for me as she ought to have done, so I had to come here as best I could; and here I am, safe and sound, thanks to Sir Owen St. Lambert."

"I'm sure I'm very grateful to Sir Owen," said Mrs. Kingconstance. "Will you stay for dinner?" she added, rewarding him involuntarily with the offer of the thing she liked best in the world herself. But Sir Owen was expected at Normanton.

"Then come to-morrow," said Babs, clasping his hand.

He looked down into her face for a moment intently. Miss Kingconstance observed the look.

"Did Sir Owen say he would come to dinner to-morrow?" Mrs. Kingconstance asked, when he was gone.

"No, he didn't say; but he will come, I assure you," her sister-in-law answered, dryly.

CHAPTER XXXIII

BABS rushed up to Montacute's room. He was lying back on a large pillow with his eyes shut. A nurse was sitting in the window, quietly sewing. Babs stood gazing at her brother. He looked like death.

Presently he moaned and muttered a little, then opened his eyes and looked at her vaguely.

"Cute!" she cried.

The nurse rose and came to the bedside.

"I'm afraid he won't know you," she said. "He's been wandering all day."

"He's really very ill, then?" said Babs, her eyes staring in horror. She had not at all realized that there might be danger. Like her mother, she was too accustomed to Montacute's periodical seizures to be easily alarmed about him. She had been prepared to sympathize, not to be frightened.

"Yes," said the nurse, with professional cheeriness, "he *is* ill. I've seen them worse, though."

Babs stooped to kiss him. He stared at her strangely, then turned his head impatiently away.

"Better not disturb him," said the nurse.

Babs sank into a chair beside the bed, and sat gazing at the patient in an agony of apprehension.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney came noiselessly into the room and stood beside her, looking utterly dejected. He had made up his mind that his own luck depended somehow upon that boy's life, and he was far from hopeful.

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"Will he die?" said Babs.

"God forbid!" Mr. Jellybond answered, fervently.

Babs sat some time; she even thought she would stay all night; but Montacute's feverish mutterings got on her nerves, and at last she could stand it no longer and took refuge in her own room. Hers was not the stuff that night-nurses are made of. With all the strength of her pleasure-loving temperament she resented the pain of the position, the anxiety, all the suffering it inflicted upon herself to see him so.

Being worn out with the journey and the many emotions of the day, she went to bed as soon as she had had something to eat, and slept soundly for some time; then awoke with a start, and was immediately conscious of a terrible sense of misery. It was the most distressing sensation she had ever had, and she was ready on the instant to do anything desperate to relieve it. She jumped up. To whom could she go for comfort? Was there any way to ease this pain?

For answer, as it seemed, there flashed into the room from across the valley the light on the tower.

"Cadenhouse!" she cried, stretching out her arms to him.

She uttered the name as if it were an incantation, and as she uttered it the strong feeling she had always had for Cadenhouse revived, and her new knight vanished from her recollection.

Having dressed hurriedly in knickerbockers and a short walking-skirt, she left her room; but with no very definite intention.

To her surprise she found the lights still burning and people moving about in the house. Looking down into the hall, she saw Benson and Clodd and the first footman hanging about with the air of people who are awaiting an event. She went on down to the sick-room. The door was half open; she heard Montacute still



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moaning and muttering incoherently. Mr. Jellybond Tinney sat beside the bed. There was something pathetically patient in his attitude. All his jauntiness was laid aside ; he looked older and more worn in the dim light than Babs had ever seen him look. The nurse was bending over the patient. She straightened herself and stood as though in doubt.

" Shall we alarm his mother ?" Mr. Jellybond asked,

" The vicar is in the house, is he not ?" she answered, indirectly.

" Yes," he said.

" It might be as well to have the prayers," she said.

" It can do no harm," said Mr. Jellybond Tinney, rising, with the sense of relief which comes of finding something to do in the midst of a painful period of suspense and inaction. " I will assemble the family."

As he left the room he encountered Babs.

" Is there no hope ?" she said, wringing her hands.

" Where there is life there is—er—" he began mechanically ; but only the obvious came to him, and, even at that moment, he could not be obvious, so he left the old saw to speak for itself.

" You mustn't assemble me," Babs protested. " Don't tell them I'm up. I couldn't stand the prayers. I must get out into the air ; I'm suffocating."

She clutched at her chest as she spoke, as though to tear out the pain, and fled, all her impulse being, not to help others, but to do something for herself.

Babs, having no knowledge of life, was at the mercy of her instincts ; and her instinct now was to fly to Cadenhuse. The light burned bright on the tower. There was distraction in the excitement of getting there ; and once there—but she did not trouble herself to define.

Avoiding the servants by going down a back staircase, she let herself out by a window on the ground floor and made for the stable-yard. There was a light in the

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harness-room, and the door was open ; but nobody was about. She seized saddle and bridle and whip, and crossed to the far end of the yard, where the saddle-horses were stabled. Here again a light was burning, and the door was unfastened. One horse stood ready saddled in its stall, another significant sign of something untoward impending. Her impulse to fly from the dreadful event was redoubled by the sight. She slipped her saddle on to Julia's little Arab, put on the bridle in her haste without removing the halter, mounted, and rode away. The horse might be missed, of course, and so might she ; but what did that matter ? Nobody was likely to trouble about anything in the way of irregularities much at such a time ; and the fact that she had on a walking-dress would be accepted as proof that she had not gone out of the grounds. Mrs. King-constance's own reverence for the conventions was so deep that she did not readily suspect any one else of sinning against them—at all events, to the extent of riding on the high-road in a walking-dress.

Cadenhouse was in the lower stage of the tower, in the great apartment in which he spent so much of his time. He had just stooped to adjust the wick of a lamp that was flaring when Babs opened the door and walked in.

She had no hat on, and looked like a dishevelled angel, with her fair hair loose about her head, her cheeks flushed by the night air and the excitement of the ride, her sweet eyes full of entreaty and pain. Cadenhouse stood staring at her, too astonished at first to speak.

" Oh, Cadenhouse, isn't it dreadful ?" she cried. " Do help me ! I'm in great trouble—Montacute, you know. They think he's going to die. They're saying prayers over him now. Be kind to me, Cadenhouse ; I'm distracted."

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"Poor little girl!" said Cadenhouse, compassion coming before every other consideration.

He went forward with outstretched hands to meet her. Babs put her arms round his neck.

"Don't push me away," she said. "Don't be horrid to me. I must have some human prop and stay. The pain of it is awful. I can't even cry."

She laid her head on his shoulder with a dry sob.

"Poor little girl!" Cadenhouse repeated, putting his arm round her and smoothing her hair caressingly.

He was a simple, earnest gentleman, a recluse by habit rather than by nature, a man of high ideals, without the slightest sense of humor. Babs's appeal was the appeal of a child to him, of a child in trouble; and he responded to it now as he would have responded years before. He had been taken completely by surprise, and had had no time to reflect that Babs was a child no longer.

The light caress soothed Babs. A sense of physical well-being, of warmth and comfort, gradually began to take possession of her. She heaved a little sigh of satisfaction, and nestled closer. The present moment was always sufficient for Babs; had it been her last, she would have lived it pleasantly if she could.

"Let us sit down," she said. "It does me good just to be near you."

When she had spoken, she kissed his neck. The touch of her warm lips sent a thrill through Cadenhouse.

"Why do you shudder?" she said. "Are you cold? No, you're not cold. Your cheek is quite hot. You might kiss me, I think."

She looked up at him, half smiling, half pouting. Cadenhouse bent his head and pressed his lips to hers.

"I'm glad I came," she said, softly. "I don't suffer any more now. Do you know that's the first time you've kissed me since I've been grown up? You used to kiss

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me always when I was quite a little child ; then you left off, and ever since I've wanted to kiss you. I knew it wouldn't be anything like kissing a woman, and it isn't. You kiss a woman anywhere, and are glad to get it over ; but I kiss you on the lips—so—and it's somehow different, though I can't tell how."

The words brought Cadenhouse to his senses. He put her away from him almost roughly.

"Babs, you shouldn't have done this," he said. "You ought not to have come here ; you are no longer a child."

"Oh, Cadenhouse, how horrid of you, when I'm so miserable !" she exclaimed, wringing her hands. "And just after being so kind, too, and helping me, and caressing me. You trample on my love for you."

Cadenhouse walked up and down the room, perturbed. Nature had meant him for a man, but his own idea had been to thwart nature by playing the part of an angel on earth. *Chassez la nature, elle revient au galop.* His impulse was to take the girl to his heart again ; but he was too much a man of honor for that, now that he was on his guard. She must give him the right.

"Do you really love me, Babs ?" he said, returning to her. "Will you marry me ?"

Babs hesitated.

"N—no," she said. "If we were married it would be so stupid—like all the other married people. No, don't ask me to marry you, and live in your house, and all that. Let me love you like this, Cadenhouse."

She stretched out her arms to him, but he turned away from her.

"Babs, you should not have kissed me if you were not prepared to marry me," he began.

"Why not ?" she interrupted. "I shall always want to kiss the people I care about. There was a man in the train yesterday—we travelled all the way from Paris

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together—and he looked after me and was so nice—Mrs. Normanton's brother, Sir Owen St. Lambert. Before the journey was half over I loved him, too, almost as I love you. I should have been quite glad if he had kissed me."

"He didn't kiss you?" Cadenhouse exclaimed, with a jealous flash.

"No. I tell you I should have been glad if he had."

Cadenhouse threw himself into a chair and covered his face with his hands. What could he say?

"It isn't quite the same thing kissing a man as a woman," he began again—

"No, you don't seem to kiss in the same way," she answered. "It's nicer, I think. You are the first man I ever kissed. I loved it when you kissed me, Cadenhouse, and I can't understand why you are so queer about it."

"Babs, you must know that it's not right to kiss men."

"I know they say so, but they will never tell me why. What harm is there in it? And how can one choose a husband until one knows which man one likes to kiss best?"

"What am I to say to you?" Cadenhouse exclaimed, in despair. "You said just now I was the first man you had ever kissed—"

"Yes," she interrupted; "but you won't be the last, you know. I'm sure I shall want to kiss Sir Owen the next time I am alone with him."

Cadenhouse walked up and down the room again in serious perplexity. It was evident to him that Babs's innocence threatened to be her undoing; but how was he to make her understand why a girl of seventeen must be circumspect in the matter of kissing?

"If you would only consent to marry me!" he exclaimed.

"Do you love me, then, so very much?" Babs answered, with a twinkle in her eye.

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Cadenhouse was silent. An hour ago the notion of marrying Babs had never entered his head. He could not say he loved her, and yet at that moment he was fain enough to marry her; and not for chivalrous motives only, although he felt he owed her his name for the momentary advantage he had taken of her.

"I don't think you love me," said Babs.

Cadenhouse stood before her, looking down at her. She was sitting on a couch, her face upraised to his, the delicate oval accentuated by the attitude, and the expression all animated by the excitement of the discussion.

"On my word, I don't know whether I love you or not," he said. "But I know that I ought not to have kissed you under the circumstances, and I apologize."

"Oh, Cadenhouse!" Babs exclaimed, genuinely hurt, "is that a nice thing to do? You apologize because you loved me for a moment well enough to kiss me!"

"I apologize because I did not love you at the moment with the love that would have justified that kiss. Take my word for it, that kiss was an insult. I am telling you so brutally to save you from tempting another man as you tempted me."

Babs looked puzzled and distressed

"I cannot understand what all this fuss is about, nor why you are scolding me," she said. "If you didn't want to kiss me, why did you kiss me? I should like it much better if you would take me in your arms and kiss me again. I suppose you would if I said I'd marry you."

Cadenhouse hesitated a moment, then sat down beside her, and put his arm round her. His whole countenance had changed. Pent-up passion glowed in his eyes.

"You will marry me?" he whispered.

Babs raised her lips to his.

That second kiss tingled through every vein of the recluse.

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"God, what a moment!" he breathed.

Babs seemed to sink closer into his embrace. Innocence is a flower which the Church has cultivated at the instigation of the devil for the betrayal of honorable souls. Cadenhouse's senses had known no blunting experience, and the girl's unsuspecting abandonment of herself to his kisses was complete. A sudden sound startled her.

"What was that?" she exclaimed.

"What? I heard nothing."

"Hush! Listen!"

All about them it had been intensely still until now, when, from afar off, yet clearly and with weight, there fell upon their ears the toll of a passing bell—just one heavy stroke, then silence.

For many seconds they sat there, listening. The same thought was in the mind of each. They waited involuntarily. It came again up to the high tower, deep-toned, significant.

Babs looked at Cadenhouse.

"Montacute!" she ejaculated.

While they had been philandering!

They suffered a complete revulsion of feeling at the thought.

"We don't know," Cadenhouse said. "But let me take you home in any case."

"No, no," she cried. "Let me go as I came. I beg you will."

Cadenhouse was too courtly to insist.

"I shall be with you early," he said. "You will want me, won't you—Lorraine?"

"Oh yes," said Babs, indifferently. She had hardly heard what he was saying.

When she had gone he threw himself into a chair and sat there, with closed eyes and tingling senses, unconscious of time, a prey to unexpected emotion.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WHEN Babs rode into the yard the dawn had broken, the birds were singing, and Clodd stood sentry at the stable door.

"It's all right, miss," he said, confidentially. "I knowed it must 'a' bin yew as 'ad took the 'orse, and I lied like a good un. I said it was Jellybond Tinney. She's a bit light fur 'im, but 'e's not reckoned to know nothing about 'orses. I said as 'ow I'd bin told to wait up fur 'im myself when the other men were sent to bed. But Jellybond Tinney 'e's still in the 'ouse. An' lor', miss, 'e's in great feather this morning ! 'E thinks it were 'im es the Lord 'eard when 'e prayed for the young master. 'E reckons 'im an' the Lord 'as saved 'im."

"Saved !" Babs gasped.

"Yes, miss. The crisis was to come at daybreak, an', just before, 'e fell into a lovely sleep. 'E'll be all right from now ; and ole Jellybond Tinney, miss, 'e's a-struttin' and a-crowin' and a-takin' of the credit."

Babs controlled herself until she reached her own room. Once there, she sank upon the floor beside her bed and wept hysterically. This was the last gasp of the various emotions she had experienced during the day and night. When she appeared again she was quite serene, and ready for the next adventure. The recollection of Cadenhouse's kisses suffused her with a soft, warm glow. But there was the awkward fact to be faced of the silence which she had allowed him to

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take for consent to his proposal. Face it, however, she would not until she was obliged.

Over the house all day there brooded that stillness, full of hallowed thanksgiving, which follows fast upon fears of a catastrophe. Up-stairs in the boudoir Mrs. Kingconstance and Mr. Jellybond Tinney sat side by side on a sofa holding each other's hands.

"You dear man!" she said. "How can I thank you enough for having kept the dreadful truth from me so successfully, and saved me from all that I should have suffered had I suspected that there was danger?"

Mr. Jellybond Tinney, magnanimously adopting this view of his attitude during Montacute's illness, silently pressed her soft white fingers to his lips in evidence of mingled emotions.

Down-stairs, messages were pouring in from the gentry of the neighborhood. Some rode over in person to make inquiries. Among these was Sir Owen St. Lambert.

Babs received him in the Pompadour drawing-room. From the panelled walls eighteenth-century lords and ladies, playing at shepherds and shepherdesses, smiled down upon them. The room was redolent of Watteau and white and gold and delicate colors, pinks and greens and blues blending delightfully with Pompadour purple. It had an atmosphere, too, that room, the atmosphere of the period it mimicked—an atmosphere of courtly manners, distinguished bearing, love-making, and intrigue. Impossible to be there and not to feel it. Such things come naturally to mind in such surroundings, and as naturally pass from thought into action.

Babs could not have been more suitably framed. She looked like a delicate piece of porcelain herself, so St. Lambert thought, with the blue-gray of her eyes, the white and pink of her cheeks, the shining gold of her hair, and the green of her dainty dress.

"It seems such ages since I saw you," she said.

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"That is good news," he replied. "It shows that you have missed me."

"It shows that a good deal has happened since," said Babs.

"Oh yes, of course," he answered. "But the worst is over now, happily."

Babs was not so sure of that. A little shiver of anticipation crisped her nerves. She felt the intensity of St. Lambert's gaze. Cadenhouse had looked like that—had devoured her with his eyes. For the first time she realized the full force of the phrase, and commented to herself upon the fact. She was deeply interested in her own sensations.

They were standing near a window, and, in the pause which followed his last remark, St. Lambert looked out. It was a lovely winter morning. Bright sunshine showed the dewdrops sparkling on every twig. Above the trees masses of snow-white clouds flecked the brilliant blue. Down in the hollows the mist still lingered, and on the frosty air the breath of the deer in the park hung suspended. A horseman who was cantering up the avenue was shrouded in mystery by the steam of his steed. In and out among the trees he showed, a gallant figure, splendidly mounted.

As he passed beneath the window he looked up. His countenance was radiant.

Babs's heart leaped.

"Who is this?" said St. Lambert.

"Cadenhouse!" Babs gasped.

"By Jove, yes! What a good-looking fellow. He's not anticipating bad news, I should say!"

"Gracious, how my heart beats!" Babs exclaimed, surprised at her own emotion.

St. Lambert looked at her hard and inquiringly. Her color came and went. There was no concealing her agitation.

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"What is the matter?" he asked, all the lightness gone from his voice.

"Nothing. I can't breathe. What a horrible sensation!"

St. Lambert looked from her to the horseman coming up the drive. Her emotion was obviously connected with his coming.

"I had better go, I suppose," he said.

"Oh no, no, no!" she cried. "This is the day of reckoning. I daren't face him alone."

In her agitation she seized St. Lambert's arm to detain him, and at that moment Cadenhouse entered the room. The light went out of his countenance when he saw the group. He stopped short. There was an awkward moment. Then St. Lambert went forward, holding out his hand.

"How are you, Cadenhouse?" he said. "I am glad to see you again."

Cadenhouse ignored the hand. He was very pale.

"Lorraine," he said, sternly, "what am I to understand?"

Her quick mind leaped to his suspicion; but, for the life of her, she could not utter a word.

Cadenhouse misinterpreted her silence and her emotion.

St. Lambert looked from one to the other bewildered.

Babs was suddenly seized upon with a violent inclination to laugh. Her sensitive face quivered in the attempt to control herself. She dropped into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

The gentlemen looked at her, and then at each other. Each waited for the other to speak. It was a deadlock.

Babs was busy analyzing her emotions. The inclination to laugh passed as it had come. She began to feel the gravity of the situation. The silence oppressed her.

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She looked up half expecting to find herself alone. She was measuring time by her own sensations, and it seemed an age since Cadenhouse entered the room. She jumped up desperately.

"Somebody say something!" she exclaimed. "I'm suffocating."

"Pray let me withdraw," said St. Lambert.

"There is not the slightest necessity," Cadenhouse answered, haughtily. "I understand the position perfectly. There is no need to prolong—"

He turned to Babs with a hard, pale face.

"I am sorry—er—to have arrived at an inopportune moment," he said.

When he had spoken he bowed, and then walked steadily from the room. But in the way he did it, in his whole air and gait, there was the trouble of a man hard hit.

"But—but"—Babs gasped, convulsively, clasping her hands to her chest—"but people don't go like that, do they? Would you have thought it possible that he could go like that?"

St. Lambert stood twisting first one end of his mustache and then the other.

"Babs," he said, "what have you been doing?"

She wrung her hands.

"You saw Cadenhouse after I left you last night?"

She did not deny it.

"He came here?"

She made no sign.

"He did not come here?"

Still she made no sign.

"He did not come here?" St. Lambert concluded. "Then where on earth did you meet?"

Far away, above the trees on the top of the hill, the tower just showed. Involuntarily Babs glanced towards it.

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St. Lambert caught the glance, and fell to twisting his mustache again. He looked up at the tower, then down at Babs.

"But Cadenhouse is an honorable man," slipped from him.

"You speak as though there was a doubt in your mind," Babs said, hotly. "Cadenhouse is an honorable man—the best man in the world. . . . What *have* I done? . . . But I've not done anything!"

She paused upon the protest, and reflected a little.

"I don't know why it hurts," she said, at last; "but it does. I don't want to marry him, but, oh, I do want him to want to marry me—as he did last night! It is horrible of him to throw me over like that!"

"He certainly had no intention of throwing you over as he rode up to the house this morning," St. Lambert said, slowly, pondering as he spoke. "He has gone under some misapprehension."

"Yes," said Babs, in a low voice. "He is gone under a misapprehension."

"But can't it be set right?"

"No, no!" she exclaimed, "he should have trusted me. And yet I don't know. I did say—" She wrung her hands. "Oh, dear! oh, dear!" she lamented. "I don't feel a bit about anything to-day as I did yesterday. . . . I never saw Cadenhouse like that—so precipitate, you know. Before, one always felt inclined to give him a push to make him go quicker. But did you notice—?" She drew herself up in imitation of Cadenhouse's gesture as he had left the room. "Wasn't it tremendous? I never saw him like that before—Marquis of Cadenhouse, Earl of Clon, Baron Demeyne—off with her to instant execution. That was the kind of thing his ancestors did, I suppose, when they caught their marchionesses kissing? But what an exit! It was magnificent!"

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"Truly," said St. Lambert, light breaking in upon him. "But as he had not caught his marchioness kissing—"

"He thought he had, though, because of something I said last night," she rejoined. "There he goes!"

She sprang to the window and flung it open.

"Cadenhouse! Cadenhouse!" she called, frantically.

Checking his horse, he looked up at her, uncovered his head, and sat, a model of grave courtesy, awaiting her further pleasure.

"I beg your pardon, Lord Cadenhouse," she said, overcome with sudden confusion. "I ought not to have stopped you. It was an impulse."

"You had something to say to me?" he answered.

"Yes. I wanted to tell you you were mistaken—you wronged me."

Cadenhouse turned his horse.

"He's coming back," said Babs to St. Lambert, breathlessly.

Without a word St. Lambert left the room.

Babs waited with her hands clasped to her heart. It was beating to suffocation.

Cadenhouse glanced round when he entered, as if he had not expected to find her alone. The light had come back to his countenance.

"You tell me I was mistaken," he said. "I believe you, Babs; you have always been truthful. I trust you implicitly. But when I saw you clinging to that man's arm—"

"I was horribly agitated," she broke in, "when I saw you coming up the drive; I don't know what came over me. My heart began to beat in such a funny way. I never felt like that before. And he saw my agitation, and connected it with your coming. And he was going, and I said, 'Don't go!' I don't know why. I didn't know I was clinging to his arm. I'm agitated still. I hardly know what I'm saying—"

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He held out his arms to her.

"Say you were glad to see me," he said, clasping her close, and raising her face and looking down into it a moment before he kissed her.

Babs, soothed and satisfied, became herself again. She heaved a happy sigh.

"Glad!" she exclaimed. "Oh, the relief it is to have you back! I never in my life suffered as I did in the moments after you had left me. I felt so horribly humiliated."

Before he could reply, the door behind them opened. It was Mr. Jellybond Tinney. He blinked like one dazzled by a strong light, and then withdrew as if he had not seen them.

"He must have seen us!" Babs exclaimed.

"Hum!" said Cadenhouse. "It was slightly overdone. But what does it matter? I am going at once to announce—"

"Oh no, no!" Babs interrupted. "I shouldn't care a bit about being engaged to you, and everybody knowing it, and all that horrid business. I won't!"

"Now, please understand this, Babs," he said, and it was again the new Cadenhouse who spoke, the man who was not to be trifled with—"please understand this: you are not going to play with me. You accepted me last night."

"I didn't mean to—"

"You knew I understood that you consented—"

"I was consenting to let you kiss me."

Cadenhouse took a turn up and down the room impatiently, then came to a standstill in front of her.

"It was only your vanity, then, that was wounded just now when you thought I had gone?" he said.

Babs pouted.

"Babs," said Cadenhouse, pleadingly, "will you put aside all levity? Will you be serious? This means a

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great deal to me—nothing has ever meant so much. If you really love me, I shall be the happiest man on earth ; but tell me ”—he took her by both hands, and drew her to him—“ tell me. If you have the slightest doubt—”

Babs took fright.

“ I’m all doubt,” she gasped. “ I don’t know. Give me time.”

“ You *must* know,” he insisted.

“ I don’t.”

“ Then you refuse me ?”

She was silent.

“ I tell you I will not be played with.”

“ You frighten me, Cadenhouse, you are so stern,” she pleaded. “ Why have you suddenly become so different ? So long as you kiss me and pet me, we are happy together ; but if you will have an engagement, and an announcement, and goodness knows what—”

He dropped her hands.

“ The truth is, you do not care a rap about me,” he said. “ You are an unscrupulous little coquette.”

“ Thank you,” said Babs, bridling.

“ What am I to think ?” he exclaimed.

“ What you like,” she retorted.

“ I think that you have been amusing yourself at my expense.”

“ You are a man of extraordinary penetration,” Babs snapped.

Cadenhouse took another impatient turn about the room. He glanced, without seeing them, at the lord and lady shepherds and shepherdesses that smiled down upon him from the white panelled walls. His face was greatly troubled.

“ Lorraine,” he said, at last, peremptorily, coming back to her as he spoke—“ Lorraine, once for all, will you marry me ?”

“ Don’t press that question now,” she implored. Her

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hesitation arose simply from a natural shrinking to commit herself to she knew not what ; but he did not understand it. He was perfectly primitive in that it never occurred to him that it was not by argument but by wooing that young girls are won. His own inclination drove him to the point direct, and he had no notion that a more zigzag method would have answered best with her. He should have given her time ; but he insisted.

Babs turned cold ; she threw herself into a chair.

" I cannot marry you," she said, positively.

" Thank you," he replied, " I understand that, at all events. That is quite enough."

She sat with her eyes fixed on the ground. There was a little pause. Then she heard him go. She waited in the same attitude, listening. Presently there came the crunch of his horse's hoofs on the gravel below. Still she sat, rooted to the spot—sat until the sound had died even from her imagination.

Then at last she looked up at the lords and ladies and the lambs.

" What a ghastly sensation !" she said. " Yet what else could I have done ?"

But the lords and ladies and lambs had no suggestion to offer.

CHAPTER XXXV

BABS did not see St. Lambert again for a week. During this time she devoted herself to Montacute, who was making a rapid recovery. Day and night she suffered a cruel agony of expectation. She could not believe that Cadenhouse had gone for good. His habit had always been to ride over ; and again and again she fancied she heard the thud of his horse's hoofs, and her heart stood still. And often enough she had heard well, so far as the horse was concerned ; but never once was the rider the right one.

She caught Mr. Jellybond Tinney observing her closely one day.

"Babs," he said, gently, "I've seen you grow up. I can't help feeling a special interest in—will you permit me to say, a special affection for you? I'm a man of the world, and I know when to hold my tongue ; I know better than to see things which I'm not supposed to have seen. But if at any time I can be of use to you I do hope you will make me useful—if it be only as a target to talk at when talking does you good."

Babs held out her hand to him.

"I understand," she said, simply. "I haven't always understood you, I believe ; but now I know you mean to be kind."

"That is my intention always," he replied ; "but I make my mistakes, like other men. Sometimes I do what seems the kindest thing at the moment, but the effect of it is cruel in the end." He was thinking of the

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consequences of sundry comforting caresses which the recipients had mistaken for signs of serious intentions. "Still, I do my best. 'Nothing if not kind' is what I want to earn for an epitaph."

After he had spoken he seemed to be waiting for Babs to say something.

"What is it?" she asked, at last, irritably.

"Nothing," he answered. "I thought you looked anxious—as if you expected some one."

"You don't expect people to come back if you send them away, do you?" she demanded.

But she went off without waiting for an answer.

No! she could not take Mr. Jellybond Tinney into her confidence. Still, she found his evident interest in the situation a sort of help. Half our delight in our own history as we live it comes of our confidences. Those periods when we have much to say and many listeners are always momentous.

Every night she drew up her blinds, but never once from the high tower did the light shine into the room. Lying awake on her bed, wondering at her own anxiety, she said to herself: "He must have been a great deal to me." And then she fell to examining the phrase in a kind of surprise; all such phrases came to her just then with a new significance.

At first she did not think at all of St. Lambert; but after a while she remembered him, and wished he would come. Him she could talk to about Cadenhouse—he knew.

As it happened, he did not know. He had taken it for granted that they would make up their differences; and he had been expecting to see an announcement of their engagement every day. He thought he would wait for that before he went again to pay his respects to Babs. Time went on, however, and no announcement appeared. Then one day the news came to Normanton

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that Cadenhouse had suddenly gone abroad. St. Lambert wondered what that might mean, and, after some cogitation, he determined to go and see for himself if it were well with Babs.

He came upon the family at tea. There was a hot discussion going on at the moment.

"The question is: am I to be sent back to school?" said Babs, when he was seated.

She spoke in her usual offhand way; but there were dark circles round her eyes and her cheeks were pale. He saw that she had suffered.

"I say no," she proceeded. "I have done with school. I mean to strike out in a more original direction in the way of education."

"I don't see why you should want so much education at all," Mrs. Kingconstance plaintively remonstrated. "Look at Julia!"

Babs groaned.

"Poor, dear Julia!" she exclaimed. "Why should she be brought into the discussion? She is herself. Do, for goodness' sake, let me be myself also."

"But what do you want?" said Mrs. Kingconstance, in accents of despair.

"I want a tutoress of my own choosing," said Babs. "One of those new university women of the world who will teach one things. If I go on like this, knowing nothing, I shall make a horrid muddle of my life."

"What an *idea!*" said Mrs. Kingconstance, appealing to the party.

"I think it rather a good idea, do you know," said St. Lambert.

"Oh, do you?" Mrs. Kingconstance exclaimed, prompt to come round to any view of the subject that proceeded from the masculine mind.

"Yes," he replied; "but I think so more particularly because I happen to know just the kind of person for the

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purpose. She is the daughter of an old chum of mine, a charming and accomplished girl. I have been her guardian since her father's death, and have seen her grow up."

"But has she got any dreadful new ideas?" Mrs. Kingconstance bleated.

"No dreadful ideas, certainly, I should say," he replied. "But she is a woman of the day. Her ideas are the ideas of her own time, the newest and the best ideas. You will allow that we are advancing, I suppose?"

"Ye—s—s," Mrs. Kingconstance answered, doubtfully. "But—"

"Don't let us have any buts, mamma," Babs put in, irritably. "Sir Owen seems to know what I want. Do let the lady come if she will. If it doesn't answer, she can go again."

Babs got up when she had spoken, and began to walk about the room restlessly.

"Do you really think it would be wise?" Mrs. Kingconstance asked St. Lambert, confidentially.

"The wisest thing in the world, if Barbara Land will undertake the task," he answered.

The suggestion of a doubt about her coming made Mrs. Kingconstance keen to secure the lady. And so it was arranged.

Babs waited anxiously for Barbara Land's arrival. What she expected of her she did not exactly know herself; but there was a vague idea in her subconsciousness that some good—some comfort—would come of it.

When the day came Babs persuaded her mother to let her drive to the station with Sir Owen to meet Miss Land.

It was one of those bright, clear days when all seems well with the world. They were in an open carriage,

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and as they drove along together a sense of soothing stole over Babs. She was very quiet.

Part of the way the road skirted a corner of Cadenhouse's property, and at one point his high tower loomed above them. St. Lambert felt Babs sink into herself as they approached it. She gazed up at it silently. He had had no confidential talk with her since Cadenhouse's departure. She seemed to like to be with him, but she had been curiously reserved.

"The tower looks lonely," he remarked, as they passed beneath it.

Her attention quickened, but she did not speak.

"A house seems soulless when its owner is absent," he proceeded. "Cadenhouse is a queer fellow. When he was a little boy at school—we were at school together, did you know?—I was in the sixth when he was in the third; there is a difference in our ages. But even then he had a reputation of his own. The dignity of the man was latent in the boy; no one took liberties with Cadenhouse. Something exceptional we all expected him to do, and I confess that to find him at thirty-five content simply to be exceptional is a disappointment."

He could see that Babs was listening, but she made no answer.

"No one seems in the least to know where he has gone to now," he observed, tentatively.

"Gone!" Babs ejaculated. "Has Cadenhouse *gone*?"

She seemed greatly shocked.

"Yes—didn't you know?" he answered, casually, looking in the opposite direction as he spoke.

He waited long for a reply; but he did wait—with his eyes still fixed on the distant prospect. He knew that there was a conflict of some kind raging beside him; but he thought it best to let it settle itself.

After a long interval Babs spoke.

"Don't you smoke?" she said.

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Then he turned to her. She was sitting up stiffly, but there was nothing rigid in the expression of her face. On the contrary, there was a look of appeal in her eyes that touched him. Her hands lay in her lap ungloved. He took them both in one of his own.

"We are not going to treat each other conventionally, are we, Babs?" he said. "We didn't begin like that, you know. I don't want your confidence—I mean, you mustn't think it necessary to tell me everything about yourself; only, if you ever want a useful friend, you know—"

He broke off with his pleasant smile, pressed her hands gently, and restored them to her.

Babs leaned back in the carriage with a little sigh, as of relief.

"I feel as if I were recovering from a long illness," she said, "and had come out for the first time into the pure air and the sunshine. I have been greatly troubled—heart-sick, that's the word. How oddly one tumbles upon unknown phrases that express just what one wants to say! I don't know that I ever had those words in my mind before—heart-sick; but that is what I have been. I'd like to tell you all about it; but I can't. My trouble all along has been that I cannot speak."

"There is no need to speak," he said. "Let me say some of the things you cannot prevail upon yourself to say. You were engaged to Cadenhouse for a little; then you had a disagreement, and Cadenhouse took himself off. You have been rather expecting him to return; but he seems to have gone for good. And now you are going to be philosophical."

Babs smiled up at him; and as she did so she passed through one of her swift transitions.

"I shall certainly not trouble myself about Cadenhouse while you are here," she said.

There was invitation in her eyes as she spoke. She

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was starving for a caress. Babs came of a long line of women who, deprived of the means of intellectual development, had been obliged to live upon their senses more or less ; women who had all been domestic pets in their time, and little else ; and now, in obedience to the hereditary pressure of the habit, she courted caresses as instinctively and as innocently as a much-loved lap-dog or a comfortable cat. And St. Lambert, taken unawares, yielded involuntarily. Before he had had time to think, he had drawn her to him and kissed her lips.

Babs nestled closer, all her being a-purr with pleasure.

So they drove through the balmy air—she in a happy state of physical satisfaction, her heart beating freely at last after the cruel tension of so many days ; he in despair, calculating the difference between forty and seventeen, and anathematizing himself already for the folly of that kiss.

After a while Babs began to talk in the frank way natural to her. She told him all the episode with Cadence-house, letting him see plainly enough that the blame of her indiscretion should attach not to her—for it was in no way her fault that she should have the instincts of a woman with only the knowledge of a child to guide her—but to those who were responsible for her ignorance.

Had the drive been a little longer, he might have come to consider his own position in the affair ; but the carriage pulled up at the station before he had arrived at that part of the subject, and he was obliged to postpone the consideration of it till a more convenient season.

Barbara Land was a surprise to Babs ; she had not been prepared for her in the least. She saw a young and elegant woman step from the train and look about her ; a woman with bronze hair, a white, transparent skin, gray eyes, and dark eyebrows, delicately pencilled—details which struck Babs with curious distinct-

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ness, although she was not habitually observant in such matters. Barbara Land made an instant impression of youth and health and strength and perfect self-possession. Hers was youthful maturity, such as one sees in works of art ; she was at once a woman and a girl—a girl in years, a woman by grace of intellect. Everything about her satisfied ; especially her voice, which was low and cultivated, but with that suggestion of strength in reserve which her whole appearance promised. In speaking she used no exaggerated expressions, but chose the words which best expressed her meaning. This gave to everything she uttered the charm of sincerity. It was a delight to hear English spoken as Barbara spoke it.

She was a new specimen to Babs, who sat and contemplated her during the long drive home, saying little herself, absorbed in seeing and hearing.

But the first effect of Barbara upon Babs was not happy ; she made her feel small and trivial, which was humiliating, and disheartened her with some inexplicable foreboding of a perfection to which she could never attain. Babs, without jealousy, felt that her own little light was dimmed by this radiant vision. St. Lambert bowed with respect to Barbara, and Cadenhuse doubtless would do the same. They might play with Babs ; either of them might marry her even ; but this was the woman they would both adore.

So thought Babs, gazing up at the new woman on her pinnacle, and not yet knowing that there was aspiration in her own attitude towards her, and the power to rise in the generous recognition of her worth.

Mrs. Kingconstance awaited their arrival in a state of trepidation. Lady May had been with her that afternoon, and, on hearing of the new experiment in the way of education which she was about to try, had said enough

about "those dreadful university women," the destruction of the female physique by the higher mathematics, what men think, and sundry other apposite subjects, to thrill Mrs. Kingconstance with the fear that she had compassed her daughter's destruction here and hereafter, and particularly in the estimation of men, by allowing a woman of the school to which Barbara Land belonged to enter her house.

"You do not want your daughter, I suppose, to be brought up to be an ill-mannered, self-opinionated, aggressive woman?" Lady May had said, sitting up stiff as a grenadier, and dominating poor Mrs. Kingconstance by that intellectual brutality which is the outcome of the very faults she was condemning.

"But Sir Owen St. Lambert thinks highly of Miss Land," Mrs. Kingconstance had just ventured in self-defence.

"Very likely," was the dry response. "You know women of that sort always have a certain kind of man in their following—a weak, effeminate sort of creature. Sir Owen St. Lambert is a nobody of that kind probably. I don't know him."

Mrs. Kingconstance had bridled somewhat at that, but only to the extent of wishing that she had waited to consult Mr. Jellybond Tinney. He had been away when the arrangement was made, and knew nothing at all about it.

She would like to have taken Miss Land to task the moment she entered the house; but as the party only arrived in time to dress for dinner, that was impossible. For there could be no question with Mrs. Kingconstance as to which of the two risks should be run at the moment, that of cold soup, or of the introduction of advanced ideas into the household.

But she had such a dread of advanced ideas in her mind that she began to sound Miss Land on the subject

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at table, in the interval after she had taken her soup and while she was waiting for the fish.

"I hope you have none of those dreadful new ideas about women, Miss Land," she said. "Men dislike them excessively."

"Surely you are mistaken," said Barbara Land, with gentle malice. "Men like everything that is new, new women especially."

"Oh, but women's suffrage, you know, and all that sort of thing."

"You are not for the suffrage, then?" said Barbara, looking about her for a means of escape from the subject.

"Certainly not"

"You feel it no injustice that your gardeners should have a vote while you have none?"

"My gardeners," Mrs. Kingconstance echoed vaguely, her mind roaming about the notion suggested for a moment, searching for an objection; for since it was so, she felt sure it must be right. "My gardeners," she repeated—"oh, but they are such nice men! I am sure they will all vote conservative."

"What do you think of that for a reason?" Babs said to St. Lambert, beside whom she was sitting. "I've dropped my serviette: where is it?" she rattled on.

"Babs," her mother remonstrated. "Don't say serviette. It is positively *genteel*."

"Whose legislation is that?" said Babs. "But, anyway, I don't care whose it is. I like the word best, and I shall use it. Napkin reminds me of Simon Peter on a sacred occasion; and with that in my mind, I really cannot use the word every day at dinner."

"Really, Babs, you ought to be ashamed—" her mother began.

"I've lost all sense of shame," Babs interrupted, cheerfully. "I was convicted of spelling apology with two p's the other day, and I didn't squirm a bit."

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"But, Babs," her mother persisted, "you know how greatly I dislike irreverence. Miss Land, I hope you are not irreverent?"

"I hope not," said Barbara.

"What is your religion, may I ask?"

"I can hardly give it a name," said Barbara, yielding to the catechism. "To me any idea that one lays hold of religiously, with a view to making it an aid to a higher life, is religion. I believe that God, who knows the difficulty of transmitting even His own messages from one to another of us by way of our finite faculties, vouchsafes to each of us a separate revelation."

"Then you do not go to church?" Mrs. Kingconstance exclaimed.

"On the contrary, I am fond of church. There is soothing in the services. Where people have worshipped, feeling reverent, the sentiment lingers. I have felt it in the temple of a hideous painted idol in Japan."

"But are you—are you for the disestablishment of the Church?" Mrs. Kingconstance ventured.

"I am neither for nor against," said Barbara Land, "because I do not know what the consequence would be. The Church system, with all its faults, is a part of the best life of the nation; the influence for good of the clergy is great; and I am sure it would be a sad day for England were anything done to destroy their influence, especially before something better has been found to supersede it."

"Are you speaking of the High Church party?" Miss Kingconstance asked.

"No, the high-minded Church party," Barbara answered. "We want no rule of the priest here."

"Oh, but a pretty church," Mrs. Kingconstance pleaded, "with flowers and incense, and all that—*don't* you think it a help?"

"All that implies the rule of the priest," said Barbara

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Land ; " and that we women will not have. No one shall come between us and our God."

" If that be your attitude now towards the priest, his day is done," said St. Lambert. " In the days of your captivity it was said that the priest was the parasite of women."

" Now we like a *man* to be a man," said Barbara Land.

" Well, I think religion is an attitude of mind more than a matter of creed," said Miss Kingconstance ; " and anything which helps us into that attitude of mind should be encouraged."

" There I am with you," Barbara said ; " but sensuous services do not help us into that frame of mind, if we are to judge of them by their final effect. Wherever you come upon the Puritan stock you find truth, plenty, and peace ; but upon the rule of the priest there follows a blight. The spirit serves the Puritan ; only the senses serve the priest."

There was a silence after this. In broaching these subjects, Mrs. Kingconstance had had a stimulating consciousness that she was talking clever. Improving conversation was her fad just then ; she thought it so right, she said, on account of the girls.

But her attention had wandered now to an excellent *entrée*. As she disposed of it she also disposed of all inclination to controversy. She found Barbara Land an agreeable person both to look at and to speak to ; and she began to flatter herself that her own judgment was quite as good as that of Lady May, and her own chosen adviser in the matter, St. Lambert, a much more reliable guide.

" You are not in the least the sort of person I expected to see, Miss Land," she remarked, smiling graciously.

" Ah, I know !" said Barbara, responding to the smile.

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"Some one has been trying to create a prejudice. Get into a new set, and there, at once, you find your enemies ready made."

"The Old Woman—in the new conception of the word," St. Lambert said, "would give anything to have done what the New Woman has done, to be what the New Woman is, but cannot forgive her for what she has done and is."

"But what is the New Woman, after all?" Mrs. Kingconstance asked.

"The New Woman is just the Old Woman with every good quality a little better developed," St. Lambert replied. "Florence Nightingale, for instance. She was the newest of New Women in her own day, and was plentifully bespattered with mud on that account; but now we are ready to canonize her. Josephine Butler, too—any of them who have stood up bravely and fought for a principle, regardless of the brickbats flung at them by gross men and the stabs of ill-conditioned women."

Mrs. Kingconstance went to rest with an easy mind that night; but next morning—perhaps because there had been more of that excellent dinner than was necessary for nourishment, and the idle surplus had been getting into mischief in her system—at any rate, she awoke with distinct misgivings and sent for Miss Land as soon as she had dressed.

"Miss Land," she said "you have come here to help my daughter with her studies, and I want you to understand clearly that you are only to occupy yourself with the cultivation of her mind. I will not have her enlightened on any—any disagreeable subject, you know. There must be no talk of love and lovers, or anything of that sort. So far as—as all that is concerned, she is perfectly innocent—a babe, in fact; and my earnest wish is that she should remain so. . . . But you have

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such a nice face, and you are so womanly and so lady-like, I cannot think that you know anything yourself about—about things that you should not know anything about.”

“I hope not,” said Barbara Land.

CHAPTER XXXVI

MR. JELLYBOND TINNEY had gone away for a short time to settle some business in London, as he told Mrs. Kingconstance when he took leave of her. On his return he determined to propose without any more shilly-shally, and he hurried to Dane Court without loss of time to carry out his intention. He meant to catch Mrs. Kingconstance on her return from her drive for afternoon tea; but she was still out when he arrived.

Some one was singing in the drawing-room. It was a strange, sweet voice such as Mr. Jellybond Tinney, who understood music, had not heard in that house before. Babs had a beautiful birdlike treble, like a boy's, pure and, as yet, passionless; but this was a rich mezzo-soprano, produced to perfection, sympathetic, vibrating with emotion—the voice of a woman in her prime. Mr. Jellybond Tinney went to the great drawing-room straight, as if he had been called.

Barbara was singing to Babs, who was lying on a sofa, sensuous little animal that she was, revelling in the music.

The singing ceased just as Mr. Jellybond Tinney entered the room.

Babs heaved a big sigh.

"I don't know whether it's earth or heaven," she exclaimed.

"Neither do I," said Mr. Jellybond Tinney.

They had not heard him enter the room. Barbara



"BARBARA WAS SINGING TO BABS"

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turned round, and Mr Jellybond Tinney, seeing a face that matched the voice, gazed incontinently, and forgot to bow.

"Go on, Barbara," Babs urged. "Oh, I forgot. Manners! How do you do, Mr. Jellybond? Ladies needn't get up to shake hands—though I confess it's nicer when they do; more gracious. Mr. Jellybond Tinney—Miss Barbara Land; Miss Barbara Land—Mr. Jellybond Tinney. There! It's more hospitable to introduce. Now, go on, Barbara, do; there's a dear! Mr. Jellybond Tinney loves music. Mr. Jellybond, don't interrupt. Just sit down there like a good man, where you can hear, see, and adore."

"The heart of man could desire naught better," he answered, fervently.

When Mrs. Kingconstance came in, she found him in that attitude; but she paid no special attention to him. She had encountered Lady May on the road, and brought her back with her to inspect Miss Land.

"You are quite mistaken about her," she had said, triumphantly. "She is anything but hard and aggressive. She is very gentle and womanly, and quite a beauty."

"Oh!" Lady May had snorted. "Then she is the very worst kind of New Woman."

Babs closed her eyes when Lady May entered the room, and tried to think of something to say to shock her.

"Lorraine!" her mother exclaimed. "Don't you see Lady May? What *are* you thinking about?"

Babs gathered herself up slowly.

"I'm in love," she said, with a gigantic sigh.

"Babs!" her mother exclaimed.

"Well?"

"How can you say such a thing?"

"Do you mean to say you have no sympathy with

people who are in love?" Babs asked, reproachfully. "And here have I been rejoicing to think I have such a young mamma! *Have you forgotten?*"

Mrs. Kingconstance suddenly became conscious of the presence of Mr. Jellybond Tinney and blushed; but the arrival of Ally Spice and Fanny Sturdy saved the situation. They were quickly followed by Florence Japp and her mother, Mrs. Normanton and her brother, the good vicar, Julia, and Miss Kingconstance.

Barbara was still perched upon the piano-stool. She felt Lady May's hard, unsympathetic eyes upon her. Babs kept to her sofa, and it was evident to those who knew her that she meant mischief. The others arranged themselves so that they might see the beautiful strange lady, and at the same time listen to Lady May, the oracle of the neighborhood. Thus Barbara, hemmed in on her piano-stool, became the centre of the circle.

"We were just talking about love," Babs recommenced, with another gigantic sigh, addressing the company generally.

Barbara, with the recollection of Mrs. Kingconstance's admonition still fresh in her mind, raised her eyebrows and glanced at that lady, who, surprised herself, flushed and fidgeted uncomfortably.

"We talk of nothing but love here because we have so little of it," Babs proceeded, addressing Barbara. "Though why we aren't all of us always in love I don't know."

"It would be difficult in this neighborhood," said Florence Japp, with a ring of bitterness in her voice which caused Barbara to consider her with interest.

"You mean because there aren't men enough to go round," said Babs. "Don't despair, Florence! Be good, and perhaps you'll have a reformed rake flung to you for a husband. I haven't a notion what a reformed

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rake is ; but he is generally the reward of merit in the books."

"Ladies seem to think that a reformed rake is better than—er—no bread," Mr. Jellybond Tinney observed. "But I should say beware of rolling stones myself. It is the rolling stone that—er—barks the shins."

Ally Spice looked up at the dear man in admiration. Barbara gave him one glance which made him sorry he had risked the remark.

"Why shouldn't half a dozen women love the same man?" Babs asked. "Mr. Jellybond Tinney, *you* know. It's quite possible, isn't it?"

This was a random shot of Babs's ; but it sufficed to silence Mr. Jellybond Tinney. He glanced involuntarily at Barbara Land, and found her looking at him again shrewdly. Babs never dreamed that he had philandered with every lady in the room, and did not observe the sudden self-consciousness that settled upon them all. Barbara did.

"I think it a mistake myself," Babs pursued, "to be in love with any one in particular. For the rest of my life I am going to be in love with love alone. It does make you feel so nice to be in love with love : it's an ecstatic sensation ; isn't it, Lady May ? But perhaps you're in love with Sir Philip. It must be rather nice to have a man of your very own to kiss whenever you feel inclined."

The elder ladies had gradually stiffened with horror as Babs proceeded ; the younger ones were inclined to titter, especially at that allusion to Sir Philip May, who was not the sort of man they would any of them have chosen to kiss for pleasure.

"Where have you got all this nonsense, Babs ?" her mother demanded, in a tone of great annoyance.

"Which nonsense ?" Babs asked, innocently.

"This nonsense you've been talking about love, and all that."

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"I'm sure I don't know," Babs answered. "Who teaches the birds? Perhaps you can tell us, Lady May?"

"I do not consider the subject at all suitable for discussion," Lady May rejoined. "I believe there are certain unsexed women who do talk in this way nowadays; but I do not associate with them, and I should be sorry to see any one in this neighborhood under the influence of such a person. This kind of thing spreads like an epidemic."

"We'l, you needn't glare at Barbara Land," said Babs. "She's quite distressingly proper—as bad as you are."

The other ladies exchanged glances, not knowing whether to laugh at or to deprecate such an attitude towards the woman to whom they were all accustomed to toady.

"Isn't Babs funny to-day?" Fanny Sturdy remarked, aside to Ally Spice.

Ally Spice goggled her eyes.

"Some one was priming mamma lately on the subject of New Women; was it you?" Babs proceeded, addressing Lady May.

"I've just been telling Lady May that she is quite mistaken," Mrs. Kingconstance intervened. "Miss Land is not a New Woman at all, in spite of her education."

"But that is not my fault," said Barbara Land, apologetically. "I hope I shall improve."

"You will not improve in that camp," Lady May decided.

"Certainly not," Mrs. Japp rumbled out, in her deep bass voice. "If those people have their way there will be an end of all true womanly influence."

"You should hear what men say on the subject!" Lady May interjected.

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"I very much doubt if men appreciate the influences of the old-fashioned woman as much as they pretend," Miss Kingconstance remarked.

"Oh, but they do," Lady May asseverated.

"Then why don't they come among us more to be influenced?" Miss Kingconstance asked. "Our power threatens to die of atrophy for want of opportunities to exercise it."

"I guess they find the good old-fashioned womanly woman too deadly dull for anything," said Babs. "That's why they keep away."

"Well, I know this," rumbled Mrs Japp, glancing at her handsome daughter with an unlovely gleam in her eye—Florence was sitting next to Mr. Jellybond Tinney and exchanging confidential remarks with him—"I know this: the modern woman is not to be compared to the woman of by-gone days."

"Perhaps not," said Barbara. "I haven't a word to say against those gentle ladies of a by-gone day who sighed and submitted. They were excellent women in their way. Some of them were great women of the kind who come occasionally to show us what women should be. And the bulk of them seem to have possessed every estimable quality save one—the one which would have made it pleasant to live with them. I judge by those palatial clubs which men, while extolling the virtues of those same women, built everywhere to escape from their society. Now, I understand that those palatial buildings are being gradually deserted for the smaller mixed clubs to which men come cordially to associate with the women of to-day on equal terms."

"It is not because they respect them, then," snapped Lady May.

"Pardon me," said Barbara. "I must differ from you there. In days gone by there was a great deal of sentimentality on the subject of women; but they received

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very little respect. Not so very long ago no decent woman could go out in London alone without fear of insult ; now, I will undertake to say that a well-behaved woman may go almost anywhere unmolested—so greatly has our position improved since we repudiated protection and demanded respect."

"I am sick of the eternal woman question," said Lady May. "No good can come of separating the interests of the sexes."

"But it seems to me that the woman question is ceasing to be the woman question exclusively," said Miss Kingconstance.

"Yes," said Barbara. "The modern woman believes in herself ; but she believes in men also. She believes in humanity at large ; she believes that the interests of the sexes cannot be separated."

"The mistake men made in the old days was precisely that," said St. Lambert ; "they did separate the interests of the sexes, and all humanity suffered."

"Well," said Barbara, "it is obvious that the woman movement is having the opposite effect ; it is consolidating the interests of the sexes, and uniting men and women in their business and in their pleasure to an extent never before approached."

"And you think that's a good thing ?" said Mrs. Normanton.

"Indeed, yes," Mr. Jellybond Tinney, whom she addressed, answered, absently, with his eyes on Barbara Land.

Lady May reared her head at all this. She was superior to any argument but her own.

"There is one thing that always gives me cause to ponder in regard to the equality of men and women," Sir Owen said. "In all social relations women compare favorably with men ; but in science, art, and literature men remain supreme. There is no getting beyond the

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fact of the very few women who have distinguished themselves in those pursuits."

"That is true," said Barbara. "At the same time, more women have distinguished themselves than men in a state of subjection. Æsop is the only slave I can think of who distinguished himself in literature. A subjugated race produces no great work of art; why do you expect a subjugated sex to produce more than a subjugated race under similar circumstances? So far, woman has been the thrall of law and custom, and she has only been able to indicate the possession of power. But you will see that as soon as women begin to let themselves go in art, so soon as they cease to respect hampering laws and try for the expression of fine ideas, they will succeed."

Lady May and Mrs. Japp felt instinctively that the only way to preserve their sense of superiority was to shut their ears to anything that Miss Land had to say. They had talked to each other while she was speaking, and now they arose with one accord, and went off together in a tornado of truisms, leaving Ally Spice, Florence Japp, and Fanny Sturdy to follow together.

"What do you think of her?" Fanny Sturdy asked, excitedly, directly they were out of the house.

"I was wondering what we used to talk about—what we used to think of—before she came!" Florence Japp exclaimed, with her head in the air and her eyes sparkling with animation.

"If she's a New Woman," said little Miss Spice, breathlessly, picking up her skirts, pointing her toes, shaking back her curls, and dancing along energetically—"if she's a New Woman, then make me one, too!"

Mr. Jellybond Tinney also went home in a whirl of emotion. Barbara Land had, in a moment, upset every calculation he had made in regard to himself. Passion—that was the word. He had made no allowance for

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such a contingency ; but now, on a sudden, he found himself overcome by passion—a burning, absorbing, reckless fit of it.

Barbara Land must be his ; by all the powers he swore it.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THERE was something wrong with Sir Owen St. Lambert. Everybody noticed it. Housemaids peeping through staircase windows on their way up and down, saw him loitering about the grounds, hands behind him, head on chest, lost in thought. They remarked that Sir Owen seemed down on his luck. The squire wondered what on earth Owen was always thinking about ; he used to be good company, but now he seemed strangely preoccupied, and there was no getting a word out of him. Mrs. Normanton had her own idea on the subject. It was love, she opined, and the lady lived at Dane Court.

" Then it is *embarras de choix* that he is suffering from, for there are five of 'em at Dane Court. Pity he can't marry 'em all !" said the squire.

" My dear !"

Squire Normanton shrugged his shoulders, and went off to see to his farms. He respected women much as he did his stock, naturally preferring the finer-looking specimens. In the sanctity of private life he called girls heifers, and would much have preferred that they should be treated like merchandise, as of old.

The primary cause of Sir Owen's trouble was the fact that he was a very scrupulous, perfect gentleman, one that habitually forbore his own advantage ; and, argue with himself as he might, he could by no means make it clear to his conscience that it would be the right thing for a man of forty to propose to a girl of seventeen.

All about the country lanes he wandered, tramping the wet leaves underfoot, the dead wet leaves, trying to stifle the cry of his heart—"that girl! that girl!"—trying to subtract seventeen from forty and make the remainder less. "If Babs had been otherwise brought up," he said to himself, "it might have made a difference." Then, at least, she would have had knowledge enough to enable her to choose; but as it was—no, marrying a girl who has the ideas of a babe on the subject of marriage is taking a mean advantage, and he was not the man to do that.

"She doesn't love me or anybody," he said to himself. "She doesn't know what love is, but I could easily make her think she loves me. That is what we do, we men; we are content to arouse all that is animal in such natures for our own satisfaction. And what happens after? The girl discovers when it is too late that her husband is not the man she should have married. If Babs became my wife and awoke afterwards to the fact that Cadhouse was the only man she could have cared for really—and I rather suspect that that would be the case—what a cad I should feel forever."

Still, he hovered about her, not because he had any definite intention, but just because he hadn't. Every road he took in those days led to Dane Court. Over and over again he set off in quite the opposite direction; but always, before the day was out, he found himself circling about, and, if he did not actually go up to the house, he at all events skirted it. In these wanderings he frequently fell in with Mr. Jellybond Tinney. The two would not ordinarily have had much in common; but the pilgrims of love claim kinship whenever they meet in any sort of intimacy. They cannot disguise themselves from each other. A secret sign is set upon them, and a signal passes between them involuntarily which draws them together, however antagonistic

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in other respects their natures may be. Half the joy of love lies in the discussion of it ; and even unhappy love has that delight.

St. Lambert tore himself away from the neighborhood several times, but invariably returned. The hunting and shooting were his excuse ; but that winter was never afterwards associated in his mind with hunting and shooting. With the recollection of it there would recur to him the balmy brightness of frosty mornings, brown branches hung with crystal rain-drops, dark foregrounds of Scotch firs glorified by the red radiance of happy sunsets ; and, underfoot, dead leaves damp upon the narrow footways ; then the big warm rooms at Dane Court, lamplit, where tea was served to lovely music, and all was ease and grace and smiling welcome. Many a time did he and Mr. Jellybond Tinney walk thither together, scarcely exchanging a word by the way, yet quite in touch ; and return in the crisp, clear moonlight, both in a silent ecstasy, impossible to define yet perfectly comprehended, and, for that very reason, forming a bond of union more subtly strong than any other form of friendship.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney's place was on the direct road from Normanton to Dane Court, and St. Lambert picked him up sometimes as he passed the gate.

"Fine day," he said, on one of these occasions. "Going for a constitutional ?"

"I was thinking of it," Mr. Jellybond Tinney answered, looking at the weather undecidedly, like a sailor in doubt about the breeze.

"I was thinking of going up to Dane Court," St. Lambert remarked. "You'd better come, too. We should about catch them at tea."

"Well, since you suggest it," Mr. Jellybond Tinney agreed, and then, glancing at his own most careful get-up, "but am I right for ladies' society ?"

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"Right? Why, you'd be trim at a garden-party."

They walked on together.

"I was thinking about that boy Montacute as I came along," St. Lambert said. "He's a handful, or I'm much mistaken."

"Er—yes," said Mr. Jellybond Tinney. "He is, I have reason to know. And, by a curious coincidence, I've been thinking about him myself this afternoon. Something must be done with him. It is a pity he has no father."

"Yes," St. Lambert answered, thoughtfully. "Women of his mother's school were never much good at bringing up boys. I always think of Mrs. Pendennis. What a happy touch that was! Loving him, praying for him, admiring him, believing in him, suffering agonies of self-denial for his benefit, and letting him go to the devil for want of a word."

"But," said Mr. Jellybond Tinney, dubiously, "do you think a woman could manage a lad like that?"

"No—not manage. Modern mothers do better than that. They show the lads how to manage themselves. Just compare Mrs. Kingconstance with Barbara Land—"

"There is *no* comparison!" Mr. Jellybond Tinney interrupted, stepping out with the spring of youth in his gait and surveying the prospect with the pride of a joyous lover.

St. Lambert looked about him, too, as if he expected some acknowledgment from nature of her best-beloved mood. He did not connect these elderly ecstasies with Barbara Land, however. He thought it was the widow Mr. Jellybond Tinney pursued.

When they arrived at Dane Court they found Barbara Land and Babs in the hall with their out-door things on.

"We have just come in from a stroll about the grounds," said Babs. "Barbara's tired of it, but I haven't yet had

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half walking enough. I want to go and see Miss Spice ; will you come with me ?”

She looked at St. Lambert invitingly. They had not been out alone together since the day of Barbara’s arrival. He hesitated ; then fell to the temptation.

“ Seventeen from forty,” he reasoned, in excuse of himself. “ It’s safe enough.”

“ Wait a moment,” said Babs. “ I’ve something to show you—something I have to give you as a reward of merit.”

She darted away up-stairs, and came running down again with a packet in her hand, from which she drew a fine photograph of herself.

“ It was done in Paris,” she said, “ and I have had it enlarged for you. I knew you would like to have it.”

She looked at it herself complacently.

“ There’s nobody like me, is there ? Nobody half so nice ! I look at myself with the greatest pleasure. Everybody’s in love with that picture. But the nuisance of it is that I feel detached from it somehow. If I could quite believe that it was me !”

She hugged herself.

St. Lambert had taken the picture, and was gazing at it intently.

Barbara looked at him and stifled a sigh.

“ Mrs. Kingconstance has not yet returned from her drive,” she said to Mr. Jellybond Tinney. “ What would you like to do ? Will you come into the drawing-room and wait for her, or will you stroll round the grounds with me ?”

“ The drawing-room, if you please,” said Mr. Jellybond Tinney. “ I heard it said that you were tired.”

Mr. Jellybond Tinney and Miss Land had come to an understanding very early in their acquaintance. It happened at one of those informal gatherings at the Cross Roads Cottage when the neighborhood, hungry for tea,

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fell upon Miss Spice's scanty store and left it depleted. Mr. Jellybond Tinney had appeared for a short time and delighted the ladies with some characteristic remarks. He had been in unusually good form, the presence of Barbara Land having inspired him so that he forgot himself and worked his peculiar vein unrestrainedly.

Barbara had listened until she was so exasperated that she could not contain herself.

"Isn't he original?" Miss Spice, in a flutter, had asked of the universe after one of his most audacious sallies.

"Mr. Jellybond Tinney is laughing at us," said Barbara Land.

Mr. Jellybond, of course, protested, but Barbara would not argue the point, and he was obliged to let it drop.

The next time he saw her alone he returned to the subject, renewing his protests.

"It is no use, Mr. Jellybond Tinney," Barbara said to him, bluntly. "I am a woman of the new type. I know the world I have to live in. Your tactics may answer with the poor ladies you have hitherto encountered in these wilds, but they are worse than useless with me, they are ridiculous."

"You take my little jokes too seriously, Miss Land, indeed you do," Mr. Jellybond Tinney remonstrated. "I assure you I am the only real amusement the ladies about here have. But if you object, I will never buffoon for any of them again."

"Oh, pray, Mr. Jellybond Tinney!" Barbara exclaimed, washing her hands both of him and his ladies with an expressive gesture.

But this was the beginning of a good understanding between them. Without thinking much of Mr. Jellybond Tinney, Barbara began to like him rather. He was always kindly considerate of her. Of his passion she had as yet no suspicion. But the whole atmosphere

of the house was charged with passion, and, when that is the case, all who are in the least susceptible come under the beneficent part of its influence insensibly, to the extent, at all events, of being at their best with their fellow-creatures. Passion, apart from its special object, is as generous as it is evanescent ; it bestows something of itself on others by every channel open to friendly feeling.

When they were seated in the drawing-room, Mr. Jellybond Tinney looked about him.

"It is some years now since I first entered this room," he said ; "and I have lived through a good many emotions in the time. I have been here often enough, too, and the aspect of everything should be familiar ; but, somehow, lately"—again he looked about him—"the place is not the same."

"I hope the change is for the better, at all events," said Barbara Land, pleased, in spite of herself, that Mr. Jellybond Tinney, who posed habitually with everybody else, should be simply sincere with her.

"I don't know," he said. "It has taken the lustre from luxury, the change, whatever it is. For the best part of my life I pursued this kind of thing"—he glanced round the beautiful apartment—"my great ambition was to possess. And the first time I came in here I skipped about like a schoolboy. I felt the texture of the draperies, velvet and satin and brocade ; I knelt on the silk Persian carpets and stroked them ; I fingered the china and those heavy, handsome frames, and I said to myself, 'At last ! at last !' "

"But why at last ?" said Barbara.

"I was being received at last as an equal by the class to which such things are the common comforts of everyday life. I need not tell you, Miss Land, I am afraid that I have not always belonged to your class."

There was inquiry in his voice, and he waited for a reply. Barbara felt forced to answer, but she hesitated.

"I will say this for you, Mr. Jellybond Tinney," she said, at last, "if you *are* a self-made man, you have made yourself well by reason of certain ideals of which you now and then give one a glimpse, the ideals of gentleness, which I know you hold. It is for want of those ideals that the *nouveau riche* is such a detestable person as a rule."

Mr. Jellybond Tinney's countenance glowed.

"But doubtless you noticed a remnant of the commercial manner," he ventured; "a certain uneasiness in association with your own class, born partly of the consciousness of a difference of position and partly of the habit of getting the best of a bargain and the fear of being found out."

"No, I noticed nothing of that kind," said Barbara. "If you were a commercial man, it was honorable commerce, which is compatible with the most generous and elevated sentiments. But that uneasiness you speak of, there is deprecation in it. I believe it is more often than anything the outcome of a sensitive shrinking from the insolent airs which ill-bred people of the upper classes are apt to give themselves. Their impertinences are so many cowardly blows to the self-respect of the man who serves them—cowardly because they know he cannot resent them."

"You are a democrat, I perceive, Miss Land," Mr. Jellybond Tinney observed.

"I hope to live to see the institution of the cultivation, in all classes, of common politeness," said Barbara Land. "I sometimes think that the best manners are preserved in the shops at present."

"You were speaking about the ideals of gentleness," Mr. Jellybond Tinney said. "It is only by very slow degrees that I have arrived at those ideals. I did not hold them when I first came here. But I was intelligent enough to know—I had associated with gentlemen

enough to discover—that there was a radical difference between their habits of mind and mine, and I set myself to observe—to find out what that difference might be, for I was determined to conquer the difficulty. I was determined not only to pass for a gentleman, but to be a gentleman. As it happened, I fell in with the right sort of people here for my purpose. There was Squire Normanton, a pretty rough specimen of gentleness ; but I noticed that he pulled up at lying. There was the vicar—a saint as well as a gentleman. When I first knew him I was disheartened ; but I soon discovered that I might be a gentleman without being a saint. I didn't want to be a saint—at that time."

Miss Land's gravity was only just proof against the comical earnestness with which this was said.

"Why didn't you want to be a saint—at that time?" she asked, with genuine interest.

"Oh, well—honestly, because of the cakes and ale," he answered. "My nature is pleasure-loving, and, at that time, it seemed to me that to be a saint one must set one's self to show one's Creator that He was to blame for having given one a capacity for pleasure. Then I began to see that it is not pleasure in itself, but the choice of pleasures, that matters. Nature pleads in us for certain pleasures—"

"But we are not living in a state of nature," Barbara put in.

"No. But Nature is still chairman of the committee of which we are composed. If we were left to Nature alone, of course we should commit excesses for which we should have to suffer ; intelligence, properly trained, steps in to prevent that. Our intelligence says hold—enough—when !"

"How about our principles?"

"I was coming to that. That is my last discovery. Intelligence is not enough. To make a gentleman

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principle must weigh with intelligence, and the two together influence the choice of pleasures."

"But not the choice of pleasures only," said Barbara. "There are duties to be considered; although," she added, "it is hard to draw the line between the two. Duties may be unpleasant in the doing; but when they are done something pleasant results."

"I shall remember that," he said.

"It always seems to me that Sincerity is the one word we want for our direction in social intercourse," said Barbara.

"Yes," he replied. "Cadenhouse and St. Lambert have taught me that. I noticed that their courtesies were sincerely meant, and not a thin screen assumed for interested motives, and sure to be set aside upon the slightest provocations, like the courtesies of a shop-walker in a dispute with a suspicious customer."

"Sir Owen is a new acquaintance of yours?"

"Yes," he replied, quick to see what she had in her mind. "I have hardly had time to apply my last discovery; but I have done my best to make a habit of the others, and I hope to make a habit of this one, too."

Barbara reflected a little.

"What you tell me is very interesting, Mr. Jellybond Tinney," she said. "Would it be indiscreet if, for that reason, I ventured to ask a question? Do you owe nothing to women?"

"I owe them all my pleasure in life," he answered, fervently.

"I don't mean that," said Barbara. "I mean, have they helped you—the women of my class—in the same way that men have done?"

"Only one has—two. Miss Kingconstance has hurled a hint at me sometimes, in her peculiar way, by which I have profited. But she has become a case of head without heart—a case of Nature thwarted, if I am

not very much mistaken. Head without heart goes but a very little way in this world."

"And the other lady; how has she helped you?"

"Oh, she has helped me, and helped me enormously, just by being herself. The others were the slaves of convention; they did and said and thought, for good or for evil, just what was expected of them. The lady who has helped me does and says and thinks for herself, and doesn't care a rap for any convention so long as her own high-mindedness is satisfied that there is nothing wrong in what she chooses to do."

"She must be a fine character," said Barbara, casting about in her mind for such a person in that neighborhood, and naïvely unconscious of the fact that she herself was the woman he meant.

"Women have always treated me well," he resumed, after a pause; "better, perhaps, than I have treated them. That troubles me now. It is true that I have nothing very serious on my conscience with regard to them. I may have taken advantage of the fact that I knew them better than they knew themselves; but, until lately, I got out of that by considering them as much free agents as I was. Now, I am not sure that that was fair. In fact, to be quite honest, I am sure it was not fair. It was customary. That is why it troubles me now. I have a horrid suspicion that every act has its compensation in kind; our good deeds make good times for us, and our bad deeds breed misfortunes. I have seen people suffer, too, as if punishment were cumulative. The sinner succeeded all along the line until he tried for the great desire of his heart; but that he lost."

The sound of carriage wheels became audible at this moment, and, immediately afterwards, Mrs. Kingconstance, looking as well as a woman can look hideously smothered in sables, came into the room, followed by

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Julia. She had hides and heads and tails of dead creatures all over her, displayed regardless of art as of expense; the whole effect being, not to strike the observer with admiration, but to make him wonder what she had paid for the disfigurement. She was a walking advertisement of the amount of her own credit at the bank.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney dropped involuntarily into his usual elaborate pose as he arose to receive her; and Barbara observed that he was a very different person from the one with whom she had just been conversing. She did not accuse him of insincerity; but it was hard to decide between the two, the old affectation and the new ideal, which was—or rather which would be—the genuine Jellybond Tinney.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MEANWHILE Babs and St. Lambert had gone on by the lonely way through the wood to call on Ally Spice. St. Lambert was burdened by a heavy basket of good things which Babs was taking to Ally.

When they were out of sight of the house, Babs slipped her arm through his arm confidingly. A strange sense of ease and relief swept through him at the gentle contact ; and he smiled down at her, the great yearning ache that had been in him so long now satisfied for the moment.

" I've been wanting to see you again so much," said Babs—" to see you like this, I mean. I don't see you properly when other people are by. I don't know what's come over me lately ; I feel lonely all the time. Never before did I know what it meant to be lonely."

" But now that you have Barbara—" he began.

" Oh, of course," she interrupted, " there are plenty of people, but they don't seem to signify. It distracts me for a little to go from one to another, worrying them ; but I feel lonely all the time. No one satisfies me now but you."

" Then you are not making a confidante of Barbara ?" he said. He had noticed already that she gave her confidence only at unexpected moments.

" Of course not," said Babs. " One doesn't talk about one's real self to everybody."

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They walked on some little way in silence, then St. Lambert said :

" I hoped that you would have cared for Barbara and confided in her."

" Does that mean that you don't want to be bothered with my confidence ?"

She clasped both hands round his arm and looked up in his face. He noticed every detail of hers—the delicate oval, the sensitive mouth with red lips parted enough to show the little white, even teeth ; the delicate brows and limpid eyes, all innocent of self-consciousness as a child's. Her whole mind was set upon unravelling the mysterious puzzle which life had become to her ; all of herself that came into the effort was objective.

" I wish I could be sure," slipped from him unawares.

" Sure of what ?"

" Sure of which—of whom you will love in the end, when you are a woman."

" Sure of which, you mean. Why did you correct yourself ? You want to know—you were thinking of—Cadenhouse " (he noticed her hesitation at the name)—
" and of—"

" Myself," he said.

She dropped his arm, and walked on in silence beside him a little, considering.

" I love you both," she said, " but differently. There has never been a moment in my life when I didn't love Cadenhouse ; that is always going on, you know. But I have had other loves in between. You are the principal one. Indeed, I'm not sure now which of the two I care for most."

" If you were asked to choose between us ?"

" Which I would marry ? Well, I don't think I could—if choosing one meant giving the other up. I want you both. I should like to have Cadenhouse for my Sunday lover and you for my everyday one. I should like to

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make Cadenhouse break his Sabbath occasionally ; for it has been all Sabbath with Cadenhouse. It wasn't Sabbath though, when—"

She was going to say when she kissed him, but stopped short ; the fine intuitive delicacy of awakening womanhood checking her for the first time.

" Do you know," she said, after a long pause, " it's a curious thing, but I could no more go again for comfort or anything else to Cadenhouse than I could fly. Why, I wonder ?"

" You are growing up, Babs," St. Lambert said. " Only children can be forgiven for such escapades."

Babs saw the reproof.

" That was delicately done," she said, admiringly. " It didn't hurt a bit. But don't be afraid to blame me frankly when you think me to blame. The risk of these delicate subtleties is that one is not sure to see the point."

" I wish you were older, Babs," he sighed.

" I feel much older," she said. " Cadenhouse's anger was an agonizing experience to begin with, and his absence has been more agonizing still. I have been feeling humiliated somehow ; I can't tell how ; but you are making me feel myself again. You did that before while I was with you. Do you remember that day in the carriage when you told me he had gone ? At first all my machinery went whirling round and round. Then I was conscious of being furiously miserable—isn't that a funny expression ? I never thought of it before, but it is just what I mean. I was both furious and miserable. I should like to have battered my own skull in to relieve the pain here"—she clasped her hands on her chest. " I pretended to be philosophical—I don't know if I imposed upon you. But if you had not petted me, I should have done something desperate."

" You refused Cadenhouse and gave him no choice

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but to go ; and then you were hurt because he went, it seems to me."

"Precisely," she answered, candidly. "How clever you are ! But why do you wish that I was older ?"

"Because, if you were, I might suppose that you knew your own mind, and then I should ask you to marry me."

"Would you ?" said Babs. "Now that would be nice of you. Then, if I married you, when I was miserable I should always have you at hand to talk to as I did that day in the carriage. That was a great relief."

"You would marry me in order to be able to talk about Cadenhouse," he observed.

"Yes," she answered, absently. "And to be petted, you know. The only time I ever forgot him for a moment was when you petted me."

They walked on together side by side on the narrow woodland path in silence. Babs had fallen to analyzing her own emotions. St. Lambert was a prey to temptation.

They were deep in the wood by this time. The boles of the tall Scotch firs marked with dark streaks the ruby sunset glowing behind them ; their heavy plumes stood out in distinct relief against it. The color was passing in swift gradations from shade to shade of loveliness. There were delicate odors of pine in the air, and from the moist earth uprose those scents which tell their tale of the year's increase.

"We never see sunsets like that in the tropics," St. Lambert said. "The suspicion of frost in the air strengthens the color, somehow, and sharpens the outlines of the trees into peculiar distinctness. Look at the needles of those firs ; they are like lace against the crimson."

"But I suppose your old tropics have a charm of their own," said Babs, indifferently.

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"Yes," he answered. "At Wondah it is the wealth of flowers and foliage plants."

"Wondah is your place out there, isn't it?" She vaguely indicated the east with a nod of her head. "Why did you call it Wondah?"

"Just after it was built a native prince came to see me," he told her; "and when he saw the place he exclaimed, 'It is a wondah!' meaning wonder; and it has been called so ever since."

"It is a lovely place, then?"

"Yes. Without boasting, I think I may say so."

"I should like to see it," said Babs. "I wish you would marry Barbara, or somebody, and take me out with you."

"Or marry you and take Barbara out," he responded. He could not keep away from the subject.

Babs sang out, laughingly:

"I'm ower young to marry yet,
I'm far too young to marry yet,
I'm ower young, I'm far too young
To take me from me mammy yet."

St. Lambert's face contracted.

"That jarred," said Babs. "I'm sorry. But why did it jar?"

She slipped her hand through his arm again.

The path through the wood was visible, winding ahead of them. He looked along it as if measuring the distance they had yet to traverse.

"Do you wish you were out of the wood?" said Babs.

"I do," he answered—"in more senses of the word than one."

"Well, that's nice of you!" she exclaimed. "I bring you for a delightful walk, I do my best to amuse you, and you—but perhaps you're subject to satanic moods."

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"I owe you an apology, Babs," St. Lambert said. "I'm not myself to-day. Something is troubling me."

"Might one help to dissipate the trouble?" said Babs.

"The trouble is the difference between seventeen and forty. It is, I fear, an insurmountable trouble."

He looked at Babs as he spoke, but she was not attending to him.

"What a bore for you," she said, in a perfunctory tone, thinking of something else.

"What made you go and live in the East?" she asked, after a pause.

"I wanted something to do after I left the service, and tea-planting allured me."

Babs yawned.

"I ought to apologize, too," she said. "I'm as flat to-day as you are. I got up too early. Tea will be most acceptable, as Ally Spice would say. I expect you find that basket heavy. It's crammed with good things."

"Do you always take your tea when you go to see your friends?" he asked.

"Always when I go to see Ally Spice," she replied. "I get a fit of her sometimes. I've got one now. I feel I must go and see her. She does me good."

"Is she a confidante of yours, then?"

"Confidante, no. I don't make confidantes of—women. I wouldn't be bothered with a woman as a confidante. They don't take one out of one's self as a man does. I *have* confided in Ally sometimes—used her as a target to talk at, you know. She's sympathetic. And in that way I got out of myself. That's my complaint against women friends. I can take them out of themselves, but they can't take me. I much prefer a man. Julia and Meg Normanton are always strolling about together with their arms round each other, talking nonsense. I talk a prodigious amount of nonsense too, of course, but then I know it's nonsense, and they don't."

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"How did the basket for Miss Spice become an institution?" St. Lambert asked.

"Once—long ago," Babs began, reluctantly, "I went to see Ally, and there wasn't bread enough. I hardly like to tell you. It makes me feel ashamed. Don't you know? don't you feel it?—feel that there is something shocking in the fact that there wasn't enough bread—*bread* even!—enough! That's the kind of thing that gives me positive pain when I think of it; and that's why I never will think of it if I can help it. Physical pain I can bear pretty well if I set myself to bear it; but I can't bear that sort of thing. When I thought Montacute was dying—"

She stopped short, and dropped behind to wipe her eyes.

"The path isn't wide enough for two here," she said. "You lead the way."

He walked on ahead.

"You see," Babs resumed, "however much one is determined to have a good time and never think of painful things they will recur to one. Can't you charm the pain away? You haven't petted me at all to-day."

"If I ever pet you again, Babs," he said, "I shall not stop until you promise to marry me."

"Gracious!" Babs exclaimed. "What a prospect!" She considered a moment. "Somehow," she said, seriously, "that offends me—that remark of yours; I cannot tell how or why."

"I can, Babs," St. Lambert answered, grimly; "and I make you a present of the information for your future guidance. When a thing like that offends you, it is because the wrong man says it."

CHAPTER XXXIX

MISS SPICE was in a tremendous flutter that afternoon. Having at last arrived at what she assured herself was really the happiest moment of her life, she was by way of doing a great deal to express her delight. She kept up a perpetual twittering, like a sparrow on a spout, and there was a perpetual smile on her face as she flew about the house, with her tresses flying and every other appearance of cheerful industry. She carried a cup and saucer into one room, and a plate and spoon into another—not that either was wanted ; but what did that matter ? She meant to show that she was not a useless dandilly, but an energetic and capable woman ; and as she went through the movements that indicate the character, she never doubted but that she was making the impression she desired. Her good aunt advised her again and again to go and sit down and not get in the way ; but Miss Spice chose to consider this merely a manœuvre of the good aunt, who, in the matter of work, never played fair, her habit being to take upon herself the larger share.

Accordingly Ally redoubled her efforts, undeterred by the exasperated old lady's oft-muttered conviction that she was certainly getting flighty beyond everything.

The cause of all this jubilation was the arrival of a young Irish nephew of hers, all that was left to her now of her only brother. He had just finished a brilliant university career in Dublin, and was taking a look round hunting up unknown relations, and hoping to find

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friends to help him on in the world. Guy Spice was a big fellow himself, but his clothes were always much bigger than he was. He knew a great deal of mathematics, but was pretty generally supposed to be a blunderer in all matters social; yet there were some who suspected that he was not such an innocent as he chose to appear. His hair was coarse and black. Although ugly, with the exception of his eyes—fine, expressive, dark-blue eyes, in which there was always a merry twinkle—and a certain massiveness of forehead which betokened intellectual capacity, his face habitually wore an expression of such genuine good-nature that to see him was to like him.

Poor little Miss Spice's cup of delight would have been quite full for sure that day but for one thing—the larder was empty. It was the principle of their lives at the Cross Roads Cottage to pay ready money for everything. "In that way we keep going," Miss Spice said, confidentially, to the Japps, whose days were often darkened by unpaid bills. "We pay our pennies as we go along, you know, and when we have no pennies we just do without. I believe there are people who get things when they want them, and pay for them when they can; but it's a mistake, **my** dear, I'm sure **it's** a mistake. There are the poor tradespeople, you know, to be considered. They have to pay their way, too; and how are they to pay their way if *we* do not?"

This was unfortunately one of the days when they had no pennies, their little dividends not being due till the end of the week; and how they were to starve according to their principles and at the same time acquit themselves of the sacred rites of hospitality was the question. There was scarcely tea and bread and butter enough in the house for that afternoon; and all that they could collect from their combined finances was elevenpence-halfpenny.

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"It 'll have to be tick this time," Mrs. Sophia Pepper declared, "or selling something, or borrowing."

"No, no," said Miss Spice, lifting her heroic little half-starved face. "Something will happen, *I* don't want anything, you know. I'm not at all hungry."

"I wish I'd the same tale to tell," the old lady muttered. "I suppose I can live on my own fat for the next few days ; but that don't prevent the sinkings here"—and she spread her work-worn palm on her ample stomach.

Miss Spice retired to her chamber, bolted the door, went down on her knees, raised her clasped hands to the bright blue strip of sky that showed through the little lattice window, and prayed : "Lord, Lord, have mercy upon us, help us, succor us—send somebody with food !"

In uttering the petition, she thought involuntarily of Mr. Jellybond Tinney. He, honest man, kept quite a number of poor ladies well supplied, not only with the luxuries the rich are so fond of giving, but also with the necessaries that are so much more required. Poor ladies were his pet charity. But he took no credit to himself for his kindnesses to them—never thought of these kindnesses a second time, in fact, except to repeat them. Being a methodical and businesslike man, he kept a sort of rough diary of these donations, in which were such items as :

"*October 14* : Pheasants to the following ladies—Japp, Spice, Hardy. Six tins of soup each."

"*December 15* : Florence Japp. Gloves very shabby. Six pair from Paris—*peau de Suède*. Must lose a bet."

"*22d inst.* : Ally Spice looks pinched. Wants good food. Fiction about having beef and mutton sent me. Begged her to share it in order to save waste. Also six bottles of Burgundy."

It was late in the morning that despair seized upon

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Miss Spice ; but she came down from her devotions much relieved ; and then began that fluttering and bustling which was such a source of irritation to Aunt Sophia. She settled herself in the drawing-room at last, about afternoon tea-time, and looked out, in prayerful expectation ; for the little soul of Miss Spice contained the largest faith in the countryside.

When she saw Babs approaching with St. Lambert and the basket she couldn't contain herself.

" Now, Lord be thanked !" she exclaimed. " I knew it ! I knew it ! I knew it !" And every time she said " I knew it !" she jumped up into the air.

Her nephew watched the performance, but made no remark. He had not been in England before.

Babs paused at the gate and looked round.

" How very much the same the place seems," she exclaimed.

" Was it likely to be altered since you saw it ?" St. Lambert asked.

" Yes," she answered, " because the aspect of so many other things has altered since I was here."

" Things in the abstract, you mean," he said—" not material things."

But things in the abstract were a bother to Babs.

" My only objection to you is that you *will* try to make me think," she said. " Forbear ! and give me the basket. Go into the room on the right, please—the drawing-room—and don't break anything. I'm going to the kitchen."

Mrs. Sophia Pepper, not being of the same class as Ally's father, never appeared when visitors were there. Babs found her stooping over the kitchen grate, picking up cinders from the hearth and putting them under the kettle to persuade it to boil with half the fuel necessary. From her shoulders the ends of a rusty black shawl depended, sweeping the fender every time she stooped.

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She always put on that shawl for comfort when she was wrestling with sinkings in the broad expanse of which she had complained earlier in the day. She did not look round when Babs entered, mistaking her step for Ally's.

"There you come jigging back," she exclaimed. "Why on earth don't you stay in your drawing-room to match your Chippendale chairs with your spindle shanks! Chippendale was invented to go with figgers like yours in the days when ladies professed to live on light and laughter. Those old workmen just suited their out-put to all that there was of a woman at that time—a feeble frame, a stiff back, and the pride of the devil."

"Personally, I don't care to feel small," said Babs. "When I compare myself to the universe, I don't feel any pride in an attenuated body. Nor shall I shirk my food for the sake of my figure, nor squeeze a foot, nor cramp a hand. I'm here to have my own idea of a good time—not to conform to the idiotcies honored by other people."

Mrs. Sophia Pepper started and turned round at the sound of her voice. Babs, as she spoke, went up to her, and insisted on shaking her by her cinder-soiled hand.

"Don't you snub me, Mrs. Sophia Pepper," she pursued. "I've come to be comforted. I have a feeling of things gone wrong—do you know what that is?"

"Do I know what anything else is?" the old lady growled, with her hungry eyes on the eatables which Babs was putting on the kitchen table.

"Well," said Babs, "it's a poor heart that never rejoices, and I've got a good appetite, that's one comfort. Don't say you haven't, please, for I can't eat alone. That's why I've brought my tea here."

Miss Spice came fluttering in at this moment with her hands in the air.

"Oh, my dear," she said—"chicken! tongue! *Pâté*

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de foie gras ! dinner rolls ! butter ! tea ! cakes ! *Sugar !*" and at every exclamation she jumped up into the air.

"It's a surprise party," said Babs—"a picnic for Sir Owen."

"But did you *know*, my dear, did you *know*, that *we* have a visitor ? A young *man* ! My nephew, Guy Spice—come from Ireland ! You didn't know I was an aunt ! Not that there is so very much difference in our ages," she hastened to add, with the precaution of a woman whose only hope is dependent on age and appearance. "I've never felt so glad since I was in London."

Guy Spice's lines had not hitherto fallen in the pleasant places where lords and ladies most do congregate, but he was not one to be easily abashed.

"One man's as good as another, and a great deal better," was the phrase he used to express his respect for all and sundry who might deserve it, irrespective of class. He was therefore at his modest ease with Miss Spice's guests, rather to her surprise but much to her admiration, for she had half expected him to be awkward.

"Shall I be afther givin' ye a bit of cake, Sir Owen ?" he asked.

"Thank you, I won't trouble you," St. Lambert answered, absently.

"Oh, the trouble's a pleasure, sor ; but help yourself," Mr. Spice replied. He found that his aunt expected him to speak Irish, and he was doing his best to prevent disappointment. "Me aunt tells me ye live in furrin parts, sor," he pursued. "Is it nice it is out there now ? Mic Magowan went to Australia, but he came back sharp. I asked him what it was like at all at all, and he ses, 'Oh, Guy, me boy,' ses he, 'but it's a foine place to live out of.' But mebbe you're not in Australia, Sir Owen."

"Not at present," St. Lambert answered. "I'm in the East."

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Babs caught a twinkle in the Irishman's eye, and noticed from that moment that he and St. Lambert were in touch.

"Will there be an opening in your part of the world for a promising young man of the clerical persuasion, d' ye think?" Guy asked.

"Oh, Guy!" fluttered Miss Spice, "you would never think of going away to one of those dreadful climates!"

"I'd be glad of the chance," he replied. "And as to dreadful—look at Sir Owen there!"

"Oh, but think, with all those letters after your name! If you stay here and go into the Church, you might rise to be a rector in time!"

"True for ye," said Guy. "I moight. But I should have to live on the prospect meanwhile, and that's like fillin' your mouth with an empty spoon. It's hard to whistle widout the upper lip, Aunt Ally, dear; and a man's degree don't count for much in the old counthry if he's got no money to speak of, nor friends, nor introductions to back him. Besides, I want more elbow-room. Here men's faculties are getting to be too evenly balanced because of the crowd. There isn't room enough for individual expansion in any one direction."

"There's truth in what you say," St. Lambert answered, speaking with an effort. "I should like to discuss your prospects with you. Are you doing anything just now? I have to walk back with Miss Lorraine, but if she did not mind—" St. Lambert was doggedly determined not to walk back with Babs alone. He was cultivating weakness by allowing himself to doubt his own strength.

Babs did not mind a bit. On the contrary, she was unflatteringly pleased to add the Irishman to her escort.

Miss Spice watched them depart, all three together, and felt herself a success for the first time in her life. She shook back her curls, and ran about holding up her

arms as if she would flutter up to the ceiling, so light was her heart. Sir Owen did not fill the same space either in her estimation or in her house as that other dear man, Mr. Jellybond Tinney ; but oh ! but oh ! she did sometimes feel that the quality of him was superior.

It was Mr. Jellybond Tinney, however, who, that evening, in a graceful note, begged her acceptance of a fine sirloin of beef and a sack of potatoes ; for which, as a lonely bachelor, he had no use.

On the way back from Dane Court, St. Lambert asked Guy Spice if he had decided upon a profession.

" Well, I think so, pretty well," he answered. " I've had hankerings after the medical, but I think it will be the Church. I had a chum at college, a medical student, a shrimp of a fellow, straight up and down like a yard of pump water, and lithe enough to tread down meal in the barrel of a fowling-piece—his line was the medical. He's a clever varmint who'll make his name ; and he almost persuaded me. But I'm hankering after the Church."

" The Church militant then, I suppose ?"

Guy laughed.

" The Church manly, at any rate," he said, after a pause. " No millinery for me, and no morbid mediævalism. Nature is God's law, and that's good enough for me ; Nature abhors celibacy. We don't want to see the wholesome, healthy creed of Christ overlaid with morbid mediævalisms in this country, *I* say ; but that's the danger threatening—the rule of the celibate priest, which has wrecked every country upon which it has obtained a hold. In Nature, it is said, there are no rewards and punishments, there are consequences ; and the consequences of celibacy are dire."

CHAPTER XL

THE next morning, immediately after breakfast, General St. Lambert arrived at Dane Court. He encountered Barbara Land in the hall. She was surprised to see him so early, and also concerned because he looked haggard and anxious.

"I've come to say good-bye to you all," he said. "I'm off by the next mail. I've been up all night packing. It's rather a rush."

Barbara looked up at him gravely. She seemed to understand. At all events she asked no questions; but she sighed heavily.

"I shall miss you dreadfully," she said. "Things are not coming right. I'm disheartened."

"About Babs?"

"Yes."

They had turned into the Pompadour room, the room made memorable to St. Lambert by the scene with Cadence. He had not entered it since that morning, and now, as he looked around, he was seized by a flood of painful recollection. He suffered more in the retrospect, though, than he had done at the moment. There is a certain interest and excitement in the action of a scene which is altogether absent from the retrospect; hence the chill impression that depresses. St. Lambert had gone through some novel phases since he had made the acquaintance of that room, and there was sufficient change in his point of view to awaken the sensation which Babs had experienced the day before when she

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found no change in the aspect of scenes familiar to correspond with the change in herself. The fact that the room was the same emphasized the difference St. Lambert felt in himself—and exposed it.

"I ought to have gone long ago," slipped from him unawares.

Again Barbara looked at him gravely, but asked no question.

"What do you say?" he asked, after a pause.

Then she smiled.

"I say that it is strange that you, my beloved guardian, who have guided and directed me so wisely all my life, should come to me for advice," she answered, playfully.

"But since you ask me, I think—I think if you go you will do well, as you always do. There is nothing to be done here now that you can do."

"I should like to be sure that there is something still for you to do," he said; "but what was that you said about being disheartened?"

Barbara hesitated.

"I feel that I am useless here," she said, at last. "I am doing your little girl no good. No one could help her, tied and bound as I am by every convention. I have half made up my mind to resign my post and take to literature. You know I have a pretty trick of smartness. And I should soon learn, like the rest, to make side slashes with my pen at other women writers just to show my superiority to every code which does not embrace the recognized antagonism of woman to woman. Then the critics would say I could write."

"Don't be bitter, Barbara."

"Why did you impose such an impossible task upon me?" she demanded. "Why did you set me to develop such a girl? She has no soul at all."

"So I hear every one say," he answered, dryly.

Barbara looked at him sharply.

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" You suspect that she has a soul," was her reflection.
" Well, you may be right. The eyes of love see deep."

" Barbara," he said, " I begin to suspect that you have not arrived at that suspension of the worrying faculties which rests the body and at the same time encourages the spirit to speak. Well, I understand your disheartenment among these thralls of custom. I have often asked myself the meaning of it all since I came back this time—this casual life, these ridiculous elderly people, feeding and flirting; this flawless Cadenhouse, not known to be a man of even one weakness, dominating the place whether he be here or not, and always more or less invisible—busy, self-absorbed, making his own soul up there in that high tower on the hill, careless of all else. This girl Julia, scheming already for worldly possessions; this girl Babs, frankly a little Pagan, living for her senses alone, even if for her finer senses, but still, as one perceives in flashes, with something in her beyond—possibilities which add to the pity of it because they are not being developed. Mrs. Kingconstance, Mrs. Japp and Florence, poor little Ally Spice, Fanny Sturdy, all innocently engaged in the pursuit of man, their one pursuit in life, man-hunting extraordinary. Then my sister—that mother of many of whom one would like to have said that she had chosen the better part, only that the fact is that she never would have chosen that better part had she had any choice in the matter. She has only the animal instinct of maternity, which urges the mother to protect her young while they are helpless; once they can run alone, she lets them go—uninfluenced, unguided, uninformed in any of the principles that make noble men and women; launches them into the world fit for nothing but to join the wretched mob of wastrels whose only function seems to be to add to the miserable complications of life. And why are they all such failures? Because they are all deliberately trivial."

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"The position is hopeless!" Barbara mourned.

"No, I don't agree with you there," he replied. "I don't agree because of Lorraine Kingconstance. When I was here last hers was one of the most hopeless cases of all, apparently, a case of an unhealthy mind making mischief in a healthy body. But there has come to her in the interval some strange awakening—something which has made her life purposeful and is saving her. And she was very far gone. She had even lost the sense of the weight of words. Yet you see her now, interested in everything!"

"What roused her?"

"Heaven knows!" he said; "but roused is just the word. And that is what they all want here—to be roused, to be taken out of themselves, to be given an objective interest in life; to be made to feel that what they are and say and do signifies. In such places the past lingers, the present finds it hard to penetrate. You remember your reception by Lady May on the sole supposition that you did not subscribe to some of her prejudices? She is almost civil to you now, I believe."

"More than civil," said Barbara. "She has absolutely gushed—she must have heard that I am a descendant of the ancient Lords of Land. How it does irritate one, that sort of snobbery!"

"It is detestable," he answered. "Still, I maintain that they are not all hopeless. Here, even here, in the whole country-side, working, filling up the intervals of life and thought, is the spirit—the divine spirit that makes for progress."

He rose as he spoke.

"Then you are really going?"

"Yes. I want to see my little girl before I face the family. Then I am off."

"But have you no orders for me?"

"Orders? No! I have nothing for you but the old

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watchword, Barbara—your father's last word to me when he had given you into my safe-keeping : I rely upon you."

"If I can help it, you shall not rely in vain," she said.

He kissed her forehead paternally, and let her go.

A few minutes afterwards Babs swept into the room, slammed the door vehemently, and fell into a tragic attitude.

"What's this I hear?" she cried.

"That I am going."

"Oh, but you can't go, you know. I want you."

"May I ask for what particular purpose?" he inquired, with smiling irony.

"To amuse me, of course," she said, frankly.

"I thought so," he replied. "It does not seem to have occurred to you that there are other pursuits which might amuse *me* more."

"The possibility presents itself to me now," she said ; "but the probability does not."

He twinkled.

"I am going, however," he said.

"Do you mean to say you are going without even having proposed to me properly? How dare you! and after having talked so much about it, too! How do you know I shall not begin to break my heart directly the hall-door has shut upon you?"

"It would be a redeeming point in your character if you did," he said. "It would show that you are capable of caring for somebody besides yourself."

Babs was staggered. She had been standing in the middle of the room, delivering herself of her sentiments with her accustomed emphasis; now she went forward and sat down on the corner of a couch.

St. Lambert drew up an easy-chair, and sat so that he could see her face. He had responded to her in a banter-



“‘YOU ARE GOING WITHOUT EVEN HAVING PROPOSED TO ME.’”

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ing tone ; but there was something in his eyes that sobered her.

From the white panelled walls the eighteenth century smiled down upon them. Babs knew that the eyes of the lord and lady shepherds and shepherdesses were fixed upon her ; she fancied the rustle of brocade as they settled to closer attention ; she felt them twitch the blue ribbons by which the lambs were led ; she detected faint odors of old-world perfumes—dried roses mingled with lavender, cinnamon, clove, and musk. That the eighteenth century should gaze with rapt attention upon the nineteenth seemed natural to Babs. She looked out of the window, down the long avenue, and was reminded of the misty morning when Cadenhouse came riding, radiant, to claim her promise. In her heart she did not believe he never would come again.

“ Why do you shrug your shoulders, Babs ? ” St. Lambert asked.

“ I was saying to myself I don't care.”

“ Do you mean it ? ”

“ No. I don't know. I was reminded of Cadenhouse—that morning. There is a terrible barrier between us when one comes to think of it. He hasn't any sense of humor. And how can two people agree who don't laugh at the same things ? ”

“ Why laugh at all ? ” St. Lambert said. “ There's a higher happiness than that.”

“ Indeed ! ” said Babs, politely.

There was a pause.

“ It doesn't seem right somehow that you should be going now,” she said, at last.

“ If I could do you any good by staying, I should stay,” he replied.

“ I wonder what you mean by ‘ good,’ ” said Babs. “ For of course you do me good. There's a lightness and brightness in the atmosphere the moment you ap-

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pear, and an end of every attempt to improve the occasion which does me more good than anything."

"Are you determined to spend your life in the pursuit of pleasure?" he answered, indirectly.

"Certainly," she said. "What else is there to do?"

"Well, you might vary the monotony of one pursuit by adding another to it," he suggested. "You might also be developing your soul."

Babs laughed derisively.

"You know that I have no soul," she said.

"I know that they say so," he replied. "But I believe that you have a soul, and a brave little soul, too."

Babs looked gratified.

"Now that is nice!" she exclaimed. "I don't know why, but it pleases me more than anything that has ever been said to me."

"That is because the ambition which you secretly cherish is to have a soul," he said.

Her eyes fell ; she was thinking.

"And as to making pleasure the pursuit of your life," he continued, "no pleasure, I assure you, would result from that. That would be making a business of it ; and the moment you do that you change its character. Business is not pleasure, you know."

"Of course not," she said. "I love to hear you talking about me. I do so enjoy myself as a subject of conversation. Tell me my faults. Which is the greatest?"

"Want of aspiration," he answered. "You are training yourself to be nothing but a sensuous little animal."

"I know," she said. "I know I'm not so nice as I was when I was younger. I was nearer to something then—something I seem to have lost since—since I lost touch with Cadenthouse. But go on—go on. I like to hear you talk. You put things in a way I like. You appeal to some sense in me that responds pleasantly. I

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sometimes suspect that I don't know a bit how to live, and I am sure, until you came, no one ever tried to teach me. Barbara would, I think, if I let her ; but as I always snub her when I suspect that she is about to begin, her teaching has not as yet amounted to much. Still, I perceive that the New Woman has aspirations and ideals which I have not. Aunt Lorraine is a specimen of what the Old Woman with aspirations becomes. She had to stifle her aspirations for want of an outlet, and there was nothing left for her to do but to pray ; so she prayed—prayed her hopes of happiness to death. Julia is a specimen of the Old Woman without aspirations, with nothing but a common philosophy ; she preys, too, in her way—she is born to prey on society, to be a tremendous social success. I am the outcome, too, of the old rotten house of bondage, but I am the reaction from it ; you can't control me ; it is my nature to be outrageous."

"It is your habit, not your nature, to be outrageous," he replied. "Had anybody taken you in hand in time to correct the habit it would never have grown upon you. But it is still possible to break yourself of it ; you have only to give yourself time to think. You must give yourself time for everything. You don't take your life in proper slow time, that's the difficulty. You try to rush through everything. In the matter of a book, for instance—do you seek to prolong the pleasure when it interests you ? Not a bit of it ! You flip through it, the faster the better, and gather from it nothing but an overload of undigested ideas, which resolve themselves into opinions mainly indicative of want of comprehension, sterility of thought, narrowness of mind, and absence of heart. Sympathetic insight is a faculty that must have free play ; hustle it and it cannot act ; give it time and you reap a rich reward of extra enjoyment in yourself, of extra appreciation from others."

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"That's nice, too," said Babs. "Why didn't you talk like that before?"

Her tone was entirely perfunctory, and she was looking about her as she spoke. He could not tell if she had even heard what he said. He waited a little.

"What are you thinking about, Babs?" he said, at last.

"I was thinking of the difference between us," she answered, ruefully.

"The difference between seventeen and forty," slipped from him unawares.

"Nonsense!" she said. "What difference does that make? It was the difference between your ideals and mine that struck me. I almost wish—that yours were mine! And so you are really going?" She sighed. "I feel it strangely blank—the prospect—without you."

St. Lambert was twisting his mustache nervously. He had risen.

"Good-bye, little girl," he said. "I wish I could be sure that you would make a friend of Barbara while I am away."

"Then you don't propose to stay away forever," Babs said, rising also as she spoke.

"I propose to come back the moment you want me. If you are in any difficulty, if you ever want a friend, send for me without hesitation. See"—he sat down at a writing-table and wrote—"see, here is an address which will always find me."

Babs took the paper from his hand mechanically.

"It's horribly depressing, all this," she complained.

He held out his hand to her.

"I think I shall kiss you good-bye," she said, putting her hands on his shoulders. She pressed her lips to his neck. "How nice you smell!" she observed. "What sort of soap do you use?"

"Well, really, Babs—isn't that inquiry somewhat intimate?"

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Babs stood off from him considering.

"I wonder why I should have chosen that particular piece of idiotcy from among all my thoughts at this moment—chosen to give utterance to it?" she wanted to know. "Do you find after a thrilling interview that you always suffer more for one particular piece of idiotcy than for any of the others? That is the one I shall suffer for this time. *What sort of soap do you use?* Good heavens! I could tear myself up when I think of it. I have so many things in my mind all at once, and all clamoring for expression. If language allowed it, I could express a dozen different sensations at the same moment. Little bits of such a fabric of feeling jerked out *staccato* must seem absurd. . . . Good-bye, then, since it must be good-bye!"

"Good-bye," he responded. "You will be grown up, perhaps, the next time I see you; but, on my word, I don't know whether I wish it or not. Good-bye means 'God bless you.'"

"Let's hope He will," said Babs.

She could not eat her luncheon that day, a circumstance which she very much resented.

"Why on earth these comings and goings should spoil everything, I can't imagine," she said. "I should have thought it enough to lose one's friends without losing one's appetite. O Misery! *What sort of soap do you use?*"

CHAPTER XLI

“PUT the fire to the pump, Aunt Ally, dear,” said Guy Spice. “He’d be under a very bad character that I wouldn’t have a cup of tea wid this minute.”

“Oh, really !” cried little Miss Spice. “I’m so glad. I’ll get you one directly.”

Miss Spice with her nephew was like a child with a new pet, never so happy as when she could see him eat—a weakness which Guy had been quick to perceive and careful to encourage. But he was no sponge, Guy Spice. He soon gathered from observation how straitened the circumstances of his kinswomen were, and had only consented to remain with them on condition that they allowed him to share expenses. After some argument he managed to take upon himself the lion’s share ; but he had to prove first that his patrimony really did exceed two hundred a year by some shillings.

This sudden increase of income was having the happiest effect upon the two good women at the Cross Roads Cottage. Mrs. Sophia Pepper was frequently seen to smile, and Ally had lost her half-starved look, and was becoming plump for her, and rosy.

“Why don’t you always have a paying guest, Aunt Ally, dear ?” her nephew asked her, at dinner one day.

“Oh, my dear !” she exclaimed “Surely you don’t mean it ? A gentlewoman couldn’t do such a thing.”

“A gentlewoman with any common-sense puts her

own comfort before everybody's opinion," he answered, sententiously. "Happiness comes from the inside, not from the out. You get together a nice little party in your own house—you've room enough; and they'd come, too, fast enough, in the summer, for the sake of the pine-woods alone—you get them together and smile at the neighborhood. If any other gentlewoman objects, let her! You'll be having a lively time, and she'll not be missed."

"Oh, Guy!" Miss Spice exclaimed, clasping her hands. "*Could I?*"

"Of course you could," grumped Mrs. Sophia Pepper; "but it'll take a man all his time to convince you. The only drawback I see is the empty rooms up-stairs. Where's the furniture to come from?"

"If that's all—" said Guy Spice, and fell a-thinking. He had just returned from a stroll in the village when he asked for his tea that afternoon. Hitherto he had lived in large cities, where it was crowds and not individuals he had to study; and he found life in Danehurst like looking at human nature under a microscope, so unduly exaggerated was the importance of every trifle. He wandered about continually, making friends and picking up information. Our opinion of people depends less upon what we see in them than upon what they make us see in ourselves, and their attitude towards us. It is an unmannerly person indeed who does not respond, at least for the moment, to a friendly attitude; but it is the knack of inspiring self-satisfaction that makes most adherents; and Guy was richly endowed with that knack. He had found Danehurst deserted that afternoon by all save the village drunkard, who lay asleep in the sun, and a small boy who was stirring him up with a stick. Guy knew the man well. He had often watched him making diagonal tracks up the hill to his hut in the wood, and heard him telling himself encouragingly, as he stag-

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gered from side to side : " It'sh all a matter o' time, Cherlie ; it'sh all a matter o' time."

When he was not out of doors, Guy would stand by the hour together in the drawing-room window, looking up and down the cross-roads, and asking questions of his aunt about all who passed.

" And who may she be ?" he now asked as he took his tea, alluding to a trim little person in the freshest of frocks and most becoming of hats.

" Oh, that's Bertha from Dane Court," his aunt informed him.

Bertha went smiling by, although there was nothing much to smile at, unless it were a stray goose which was wandering down the road, and the village constable looking as if he longed to take it up for trespass.

" What an eye she's got !" Guy observed. " She can see behind her like a hare. And, bedad, she knows there's somebody looking at her, for she is blushing behind the ear like a beggar-man taking a copper. What man o' business may she be, Aunt Ally, dear ?"

Miss Spice put her hands behind her to feel how far her hair hung down her back, and giggled.

" How can you call a girl a man of business, Guy ?" she remonstrated. " She's the young lady's maid. Her father was a well-to-do farmer, but he died ; and her brother's a bad lot, and she couldn't live with him ; and her mother was dead before : so she went out. But she's quite superior, and Miss Lorraine thinks a great deal of her."

" Bedad, so do I," said Guy Spice.

" She used to be maid to both young ladies before they grew up," his aunt discreetly pursued ; " but last year Miss Julia would have a French maid of her own, so now Bertha belongs to Miss Lorraine."

" She'll be going on an errand now, I suppose," said

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Guy Spice. "What are you going to do yourself this afternoon?"

"Some sewing," said Miss Spice.

"Then you'll not come out? Well, I'm thinking I'd like another stroll when I've finished my tea, and a pipe, by your leave. You ought to smoke, Aunt Ally, dear, you really ought."

Miss Spice shook back her curls and ran out of the room at the bare suggestion.

Pretty Bertha, tripping merrily back to Dane Court, humming a tune, suddenly found herself confronted in a solitary lane by a tall, awkward-looking fellow in ill-cut clothes. She showed some alarm.

"I beg your pardon," said Guy. "Will you be afther telling me if you've lost anything, please."

Bertha felt in her pocket.

"No. I—don't think—I've—lost anything," she said dubiously, while she felt if her brooch was there and her watch-chain safe.

"Why?" she asked.

"Oh, just because, if you had," he answered, obligingly, "I thought I'd be glad to help you to find it."

Bertha laughed.

"And which way will you be going?" he asked.

"To Dane Court."

"Why, so am I. I'm going to pay my respects to the family."

"You're coming from there," said Bertha, dimpling.

"Oh, 'deed thin, it's easy to turn round," he answered.

"And, faix, since I heard your voice, it's meself doesn't know whether I met you, or whether I overtook you."

"Here's Miss Kingconstance coming," Bertha warned him.

"Well, Miss Bertha," he said, dropping his bantering tone, "what difference does that make? Am I to believe that you pay yourself the doubtful compliment

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of supposing that I should only speak to you on the sly ?”

“ There’s a difference of position, sir,” said Bertha, demurely.

“ All the more reason that I should not presume.”

“ The gentry about here think differently,” she answered.

“ Bother the gentry !” he responded, cheerfully. Miss Kingconstance had overtaken them by this time, and he lifted his hat to her.

There was a buzz of conversation in the great drawing-room at Dane Court when Miss Kingconstance entered it, followed by Guy Spice. Mr. Jellybond Tinney was holding forth.

“ We have fallen on troublous times,” he was saying, “ on very troublous times. I regret to say our relations with foreign powers are not satisfactory.”

“ Bedad,” said Guy Spice, pausing on his way to shake hands with Mrs. Kingconstance, “ bedad, there’s Mr. Jellybond Tinney laughing at the ladies as usual.”

“ Sir !” said Mr. Jellybond Tinney.

“ Oh, I’m not flattering ye,” said Mr. Guy Spice. “ I’m just telling the truth. You needn’t mind, you know. You’re much worse than they say you are. Miss Land, I ask your opinion ?”

Barbara smiled enigmatically.

“ We are just going to have some music,” Mrs. Kingconstance said, stiffly. She had noticed before that Guy Spice always managed to jar with Mr. Jellybond Tinney when they met. It was evident that the Irishman did not love her friend and she resented the fact. “ Miss Land, please sing us something.”

“ I’ll try,” said Barbara, going to the piano. “ But I’m afraid I can’t ; I’m very hoarse to-day.”

“ Of course, if you can’t—!” said Mrs. Kingconstance. She was not in a very good humor. Mr. Jellybond Tin-

ney's attentions were ceasing to satisfy her—not that he had fallen off in them, but there was a difference all the same, which she felt distinctly, and found all the more tormenting because she could not define it.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney had risen to open the piano for Miss Land, and as she sang by heart he relapsed into a chair beside her, and sat with his feet touching the train of her dress, gazing at her unguardedly.

Barbara began to play.

"Miss Land," Guy interrupted, "is Mr. Jellybond Tinney worthy to touch the hem of your garment?"

"Oh—thank you," said Barbara, sweeping up her train.

"*I beg your pardon!*" Mr. Jellybond Tinney exclaimed.

Barbara began again; but after the first few bars her voice broke, and she was obliged to give it up.

"I am so sorry," she said, turning to Mrs. Kingconstance.

"It can't be helped, I suppose," Mrs. Kingconstance observed, dryly.

"Well, thank you any way, Miss Land," said Guy, getting up to give her a chair. "It was kind of you to try. And, for me own part, I'm just as pleased as if you had sung."

Mr. Jellybond Tinney laughed ironically.

"Are you fond of music, Mr. Spice?" Miss Land hastened to interpose.

"'Deed, and I am, Miss Land," he said. "Me and Mic Magowan went everywhere to hear it in Daublin. Once we got to a big oratorio. That's a moighty queer thing now, an oratorio; d'ye like them at all?"

"Immensely. Which did you hear?"

"I don't rightly know," said Guy. "In front of us were benches sloping up one above the other to the ceiling; and first the music played a bit, and then a chap jumped up and shouted at the top of his voice, 'The

horse !' Then another fellow right above him jumped up too, as if he were determined to have his say, and *he* shouted, ' The horse !' louder than the first. Then a fellow quite at the opposite end rose when nobody was looking at him, and he bellowed, ' The horse !' harder than either of them. Then somebody unexpectedly called out, ' And his rider !' That seemed to take all but the fiddles by surprise ; but they rather liked it, apparently, for they started in playing excitedly, and the man in front with the stick seemed to go mad on the subject. Then a lot more thought they'd try it too, so they yelled, ' The horse !' and ' His rider !' till they tired ; and when they'd stopped their row the first fellow began again ; but he'd picked up a wrinkle from the rest, and said the whole of it that time. Oh, it was moighty foine entoirely," Guy concluded ; " and me and Mic Magowan enjoyed betting which would jump up next, and whether they'd say, ' The horse,' or ' His rider,' or both, till they tired of it. Mr. Jellybond Tinney, it seems to me that you are not looking well."

" I—feel the room—too hot," Mr. Jellybond Tinney gasped.

He rose as he spoke, and retired in evident agitation.

Guy Spice walked home slowly and thoughtfully ; and thoughtful he remained until he had lighted the lamp in the drawing-room for his aunt that evening. Lighting the lamp was one of the numerous unobtrusive little attentions he paid her regularly. It was the signal for her to take out a patriarchal piece of embroidery which had been her company work for years. Guy usually spent the evenings lying on the huge old-fashioned sofa, watching her work and chatting with her or reading to her. Mrs. Sophia Pepper did not appear in the drawing-room on week-days ; her excuse was that she had something else to do ; but she kept Sunday by sit-

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ting there in her best gown, stiffly, for an hour after supper.

"Aunt Ally," Guy said, suddenly, that night when they were settled—"Aunt Ally, I wish you would tell me all you know about Mr. Jellybond Tinney."

"All I know about him!" Miss Spice gasped.

"Yes. Who is he at all? Where does he come from?"

"Oh, *that* I cannot say," she answered, mysteriously.

"Well, but from the moment he arrived; do you happen to remember?"

"Shall I ever forget?" she answered, tragically. "I was his first friend here! Oh, Guy! It had been raining all day; but towards evening the weather cleared; and I went out—to buy a little something for aunt. And first I met the children—they *were* children then—Master Montacute, Miss Julia, and Miss Lorraine. We stopped and spoke. Then I went on alone towards the village; and I saw approaching me a stranger. Only once before had I seen such a man—when I was in London—a royal duke. I courtesied. He doffed his hat and bowed profoundly."

"Which was it you courtesied to, Aunt Ally, dear?"

"I courtesied to them both," she answered, with proud humility.

"Then they were both together?"

"Oh no! no! The occasions were different, but my sensations were the same."

"And what happened next?"

"We passed—passed on. But there was—there was a change. I knew—I knew—that nothing would ever be the same again. I looked back once. At that moment *he* looked back—he hesitated—he stopped—he returned. I was paralyzed. He asked his way to the village. I showed him. We walked together. We conversed. Oh, Guy! what a time! The violets were just coming out. He admired my Chippendale furniture—"

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"In the village?"

"Oh no—next day, when he came to see me. 'Your graceful spindle-shanks,' he said—"

"Confound him!"

"Why, oh why, Guy? He was all kindness—all sympathy. He always has been. I told him about the Swiss Cottage. I gave him his first introduction—to Mr. Worringham. After that all was easy for him. Ah! those early days! However, it was not to be!"

"I suppose he was quite settled in his house and received by the neighborhood before he gave you to understand that it was not to be?" said Guy Spice.

"Oh, quite," she replied.

Guy reflected for a little with a frown on his face.

"Did he ever kiss you, Aunt Ally, dear?" he said, suddenly.

"Oh, Guy!" the little woman exclaimed, blushing and simpering; "how can you ask such a question?"

"I asked for information," he answered, dryly. "But we need not pursue the subject. I can see as far into a mile-stone as most people; and it's evident that there's an account for me to settle with some one before I leave this neighborhood—confound him!"

"Oh, Guy!" simpered Miss Spice.

CHAPTER XLII

THE world had come to a standstill for Mr. Jellybond Tinney. All life had resolved itself into an ache of expectation, of hope, of fear. "I must end it ; I must know my fate," he said to himself day after day when hope was high ; but fear forbade. If Barbara refused him—! But no ! he would not allow such a thought to take shape in his mind. "If you prophesy evil you bring it to pass," he said to himself, and resolutely refused to prophesy.

With regard to Mrs. Kingconstance, he had no qualms of conscience. She would be disappointed, of course ; but then she must remember all she owed him, all the happy hours, the ingenuous distractions, a whole summer of romance—such a time, indeed, as she had never had before and never would again. A little sadness thrown into the recollection would only enhance it ; the disappointment of his marriage with another would lend that touch of sadness ; therefore, although she might not see it at first, she would realize eventually that he had had her best interests at heart as well as his own, and they would remain fast friends forever.

After General St. Lambert's departure he began to see less of Barbara. The early summer had come on apace, and she and Babs spent much of their time out-of-doors, so that they were not often in when he went to Dane Court, nor did he know where to find them, for they seldom mentioned their plans before they set out on an expedition. This it was that brought Mr. Jellybond Tin-

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ney to the point. He had not seen Barbara for more than a week except on Sunday in church ; and the deprivation was so great he determined to put himself out of his misery, or, as he said to himself facetiously, to know the best at once.

Accordingly, he arranged a bouquet of bridal blooms, orange-blossoms, myrtle, stephanotis, and syringa, all white flowers, but tied with streamers of symbolic crimson in token of the fiery flame that consumed him. This arrangement appealed to him as highly poetical until he arrived at Dane Court. There, the first person he encountered was Julia.

"What a cauliflower !" she exclaimed. "Whose heart are you going to assault now, Mr. Jellybond Tinney ? I suppose the scarlet is a danger signal : Ladies, beware !"

"Well, really, Miss Julia," Mr. Jellybond Tinney stammered. "Will *you* do me the favor to accept—"

"Now you know you didn't intend the cauliflower for me," Julia interrupted. "Try mamma."

She ran off as she spoke, leaving Mr. Jellybond contemplating the floral emblem ruefully. Ridicule robs such efforts of their poetry. He cast the flowers aside.

"It's a bad omen," flashed through his mind.

He stifled the thought, but the sensation of uneasiness to which it had given rise remained with him.

In the hall he found Clodd, and asked boldly for Miss Land. Now fortune seemed to favor him. Miss Land had just gone out alone with a book in her hand ; she would probably be somewhere about the grounds. Mr. Jellybond Tinney sallied forth. Where, he asked himself, where would Miss Land be likely to settle down to read that lovely day ? The scent of new-mown hay, the sound of running water—she loved them both. And at that moment she could have them both at once without leaving the grounds. Mr. Jellybond Tinney knew

where. He took the narrow path which led to Wyldeholme, and found Barbara seated in the shade of a hayrick, just as he had anticipated. The brook, which divided the two properties, made music for her, and the perfume she loved hung heavy in the air.

She was deep in her book when Mr. Jellybond Tinney approached ; but his shadow, falling on the page, disturbed her. She looked up.

" Good-day," she said. " You are going to Wyldeholme, I suppose."

She made no effort to rise, nor did she hold out her hand.

" No," said Mr. Jellybond Tinney, although he felt himself dismissed. " I came to look for you."

" What a bother !" said Barbara. " Am I wanted ?"

" Yes, Miss Land—Barbara," Mr. Jellybond answered, solemnly. " I want you."

Barbara hastily rose to her feet.

" Really, Mr. Jellybond Tinney," she said, " your manner is most alarming !"

" I see you do not think it so," he replied, " or you would not speak so lightly. I am sorry if I startled you, but—"

" Shall we walk back to the house together ?" Barbara hastily interrupted.

" I want to speak to you seriously—"

" We can talk on the way—"

" Not so well. Miss Land, pray hear me. You must know what I have to say. You must have seen all this time my devotion, my passion—Barbara, from the moment I saw you—"

" Do let me interrupt you," said Barbara. " I am afraid you are going to commit yourself, and you mustn't. You and I are good friends, and we will remain good friends ; but more than friends we cannot be."

" Don't say that," he implored. " You put the light out of the world and make life a blank. You must care

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for me, you must indeed. Or even if you don't care now, don't refuse me. I'm a rich man—much richer than any one here suspects. I can make your life worth having, I promise you. It isn't necessary to pretend to love me. You like me already as a friend ; that will do ; only consent—”

“ Mr. Jellybond Tinney,” she said, positively, “ you must take no for an answer.”

Mr. Jellybond Tinney seized her hands. She struggled to withdraw them, but he held them fast. Exasperated, she uttered an exclamation.

From behind the hayrick Guy Spice appeared.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney dropped Barbara's hands. Guy had been aroused by their voices from a delightful doze. He could not hear what was said, but it sounded like an altercation, and he recognized the speakers. When Barbara uttered that exclamation, he thought it was time to interfere.

“ At your old tricks, eh, Mr. Jellybond Tinney,” he said. “ At your age ye ought to know better ; but since ye don't seem to, it's time ye were taught.”

He knocked Mr. Jellybond Tinney down.

Barbara took to her heels incontinently.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney was not wanting in physical courage. He gathered himself up and flew at his adversary. But rage put him at a disadvantage, and again Guy knocked him down.

Again Mr. Jellybond Tinney gathered himself up. But the luxurious life he had led of late years had told upon him ; his once good muscles had grown flabby ; there was no spring left in him to resist the shock of a fall, and he was no match for such an opponent.

Guy left him lying on the hay, a helpless mass of bruises.

“ Ye understand, I trust, whose wrongs I've revenged,” he said, looking down at him.



“‘YE UNDERSTAND, I TRUST, WHOSE WRONGS I’VE REVENGED’”

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Mr. Jellybond Tinney understood.

He lay there until the sunset, then gathered himself up and staggered home by the by-ways, afraid to be seen. Fortunately he gained his own dressing-room unobserved. He locked himself in, and turned on the hot water for the bath. His face was grimly set. He was thinking deeply, and, as he thought, he went mechanically through the habitual routine of bathing and dressing. Dinner followed in due course, and it was not until he retired to his sitting-room that he allowed the distress of body from which he was suffering to wring a complaint from him.

"I've had a nasty accident, Mrs. Dulditch," he said to his housekeeper.

"So I see, sir," she said. "Knocked yourself."

"Yes. Ran against a tree in the twilight."

"I'll get you some raw beef," Mrs. Dulditch said, imperturbably. She had had experience of that sort of accident before.

The next day, late in the afternoon, Mr. Jellybond Tinney appeared at Dane Court. He told the story of the tree in the twilight once more to account for the state of his face, and it answered admirably.

Mrs. Kingconstance was greatly concerned. She asked him up to her sitting-room, where, she said, the light was subdued and would be better for his poor eyes. She was really tender to him, and Mr. Jellybond Tinney felt himself soothed and comforted by her kind attentions.

When they were alone together he squeezed her hand quite in the old accustomed way.

"There is an atmosphere in this room," he said. "I never can resist it. But just for a moment I must disturb it by something I—er—feel it my duty to say."

"Oh, dear! nothing unpleasant, I hope," said Mrs. Kingconstance.

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"Not necessarily, but something serious, I confess—that is, if you take me aright," he replied. "But don't ask me for any explanation. In fact, I cannot give you any. There are some things a gentleman must not explain. All I can do is to ask a favor of you. I ask it bluntly. I want you to get rid of Miss Barbara Land. Please observe that I do not say a word against her. I only beg that you will not keep her any longer in your house."

"Dear me!" Mrs. Kingconstance exclaimed. "I understand that you have discovered something; but, being a gentleman—"

"I have nothing to say but that," Mr. Jellybond Tinney hastily interrupted. "I hope you will not keep her here. Don't hurt her feelings. Any polite excuse will do. She knows that her ideas and yours on the subject of education differ widely. Tell her gently that that is the reason; that you feel that you and Babs must drift apart if Babs is brought up in her school; that you did not realize it at first; but that, now that you do, you feel sure she will understand and not be wounded."

"Will you just jot that down," said Mrs. Kingconstance, "and I'll learn it off by heart. Oh, dear! how easy everything is when I have you here to advise!"

Mr. Jellybond Tinney did his best to look love at the lady out of his blackened eyes; but the love was not in him, and he could not bring himself to say the word which would have made the lady his forever. He pleaded his shocking appearance as an excuse for not seeing the rest of the family, and hurried home.

"That's the lowest thing I've ever done," he said to himself as he went. "That's the lowest thing I've ever done," he repeated. "But what else could I do? Self-preservation, you're responsible for many a scurvy trick!"

Over his wine that night he made the same assertion,

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and asked the same question of himself repeatedly; and each time that he did so he emptied his glass and refilled it, contrary to his habit.

Next day he complained of his head to Mrs. Dulditch, and blamed that nasty accident. Mrs. Dulditch made no remark—she had noticed the empty bottles.

As Mr. Jellybond Tinney stayed at home until he had recovered his good looks, the news of his accident was not much bruited about. If the girls at Dane Court heard of it they did not mention it, because they did not care a bit whether he were bruised or not; and Mrs. Kingconstance was silent on the subject because of a certain delicacy she felt about bringing his name into any conversation. Barbara Land and Guy Spice also held their peace from personal motives; so that little Miss Spice was unaware of the dramatic episode by which her wrongs had been avenged.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney thought much of Miss Spice during his incarceration. By day, wandering about his own grounds, feeling all out of sorts, he mourned the loss of Barbara. At night, with the wine-bottle beside him, he thought of Ally. His mind recurred incessantly to his earliest experiences in Danehurst—to the days when, as it seemed to him now, he had been young and jocund and Ally had befriended him. He was full of hope in those days. All his experiences had been new and pleasing. Alas! how imperfectly he had realized his happiness! Poor little Ally!—blue eyes and flaxen hair. Thin, certainly; but genuine—genuine Chippendale.

His retrospective regrets exhaled in a deep sigh. He took another glass of wine, and thought of Barbara. To do him justice, the lowest thing he had ever done troubled him quite as much as the loss of the lady. He felt no resentment towards Guy Spice. The fight, he considered, had been a fair fight. What did make him

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writhe was the thought that Barbara had witnessed his discomfiture. But for that, they might have met again. As it was, what else could he do ?

He took another glass of wine.

Signs of the disorder of his mind were already apparent about him.

That apartment of his, so original in arrangement and design, so admirably kept, as a rule, had suffered some severe shocks of late. One night, when whiskey had been his beverage, he had boxed the lyre, and left it prostrate on the floor—the poor instrument which he had so loved for its form. But it was precisely its form and title which was the poor instrument's present offence.

"You, grinning at me there," he had said, suddenly catching sight of it—"boasting of your form. I should like to know the difference between your form and mine, you—you lyre. Bad formish when you're out of condition ; good form—good formish a gentleman. Garr ! I can't abide a lyre."

The harp had also suffered. He had recommended it to go to Tara's Halls, and given it a kick one night, a casual sort of kick, as he staggered past it, which had sent it spinning down the long room, doing damage as it went, as though bent on self-destruction and revenge.

But these ebullitions were in the early days of his humiliation and bereavement. Afterwards he spared the furniture and attacked himself, his character and conduct.

The witch in red ribbons came to see him one night. She had come to charge him with neglect ; but when she discovered his condition her own sense of wrong was obliterated by consternation.

"Whatever has come to you, Tinney," she cried, wringing her hands. "Never in your life have you been such a fool as this."

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"It's on'y a phashe, my dear madam," he hiccoughed, with an attempt at his grand manner; "a mosht deplorable phashe, I 'low, but 'tmush pash."

The old woman rose up sternly.

"You come to me, and I'll cure you," she said, in the tone and with the emphasis of one who shakes a stick and threatens chastisement. She left him abruptly—left him cogitating.

That night he had been thinking of Ally Spice again. The witch in red ribbons had interrupted his meditations; but when she had gone he resumed them. The window was wide open and the moonlight streamed into the veranda. The nightingales were in full song. He was haunted by a vague reminiscence. He took some more wine. Its first effect was to strengthen his recollection.

Serenade! That was the word he wanted. Then he groped about in his mind among cats and hot water till he found Miss Spice. Poor little Ally! But the water was warm; on that score, at all events, he had nothing with which to reproach himself. Besides, she should not have serenaded him. That was putting the cart before the horse—"blasted New Woman sort of business—disturbs balance—balance must be put right."

Here his head dropped on his chest, and a somnolent interval ensued.

When it passed he gathered himself up slowly, and solemnly addressed the surrounding objects.

"Balance musht be set ri'," he said. "When found make a note of and don't you forget it. Let's toasht sentiment."

He poured himself out a bumper, raised it to his lips unsteadily and drained it, then staggered from the room.

CHAPTER XLIII

LITTLE Miss Spice could not sleep.

She had thrown wide her casement, for the night was close, and music and moonlight streamed in upon her—the notes of the nightingale and the rays which ever illumine the pages of pure romance.

The best part of Miss Spice's life had been passed in an atmosphere of pure romance. There it was that she had sought solace and found it in the midst of dire privations. When the people who patronized her wounded her with the cold shoulder of indifference, she had been wont to escape into a congenial atmosphere of knights and dames, whose manners were as considerate as they were stately, while their noble natures bore a suspicious resemblance to her own in that they were all gentle and good and kind and true.

But since her nephew came into her life it had been well with Miss Spice. He had taught her not to care whether the county smiled or frowned. In his shrewd way he had touched upon the weaknesses of the women whose intermittent notice had hitherto been her joy and sorrow, and had exposed the meanness of their tactics with the gentle ridicule which divests a cherished idol of its false divinity without wounding the feelings of the devotee. Miss Spice, stimulated with good food and gentle satire, had already, on one occasion, smilingly declined to act on a meddling piece of gratuitous good advice from Lady May. Yet Miss Spice was still her own dear, little, simple-minded self, unspoiled, only

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strengthened. She still walked with her gallant knights in realms of faery, still gave of her best to all her world, and still loved Mr. Jellybond Tinney, the dear, dear man.

She was thinking of him that night as she lay awake listening to the nightingales. She had nothing much to recollect that was entirely satisfactory ; but supposing—

And so, supposing, she wandered away into most luxurious surroundings, and there reclined in an easy-chair, covered with pale-pink brocade. She had a fan in her hand, for the night was hot ; her ringlets streamed over a pale-blue satin cushion—pale pink and pale blue consort together, she was careful to remind herself—and there must be some pale green as well in the carpet, say, and on the chairs, and white upon the walls, as in the Pompadour room at Dane Court. In the elegant costume she wore, all these delicate shades were exquisitely combined, and the lace upon it was such as an empress might admire. Through the open window she beheld the stately trees, standing out dim, shadowy, and mysterious. From out the balmy depths of their summer foliage the nightingales challenged each other, their heavenly songs swelling in most melodious rivalry. Here she awoke to consider that last sweet phrase, not quite sure that it was all her own. She was off again, however, before she had settled the question. And now the night held one enchantment more. So far it had been a nun's night, with something sadly wanting to it. But presently there was seen, adown the farthest forest glade, a magnificent horseman slowly approaching. He dismounted. He knotted his reins to a branch. He passed out from under the shade of the trees into the moonlight, deliberately, with a confident martial air. Mr. Jellybond Tinney in helmet, tunic, top-boots, and tights, would have strongly resembled him. Beneath

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her lattice he paused, and gazed upward enraptured. Soft, he sings ! sings in an undertone, vibrating with emotion—and quite in the professional manner ! The lady gathered that the whirligig of time had turned—had turned ; that she had been amply avenged—amply avenged ; that her serenader was — er — the rolling stone, the rolling stone that gathers—er—that gathers remorse. And the balance must be restored.

Miss Spice did not, at first, believe her ears. By degrees, however, it dawned upon her that the vibrant voice was the voice of an actual singer who knew how to sing. Slowly she gathered herself up in bed, and, as she did so, it seemed to her that her hair stood on end with emotion.

She tore from its peg the one suitable garment she had, an elegant tea-gown, a surprise present from Babs. She slipped it on in trembling haste, and stepped lightly to the casement. She leaned forth. Her tresses streamed out upon the night.

He stood below, propped up against the porch. He wore a frock coat and silk hat—so appropriate ! his costume when first they met ! His legs were encased in white silk “underwear,” for he had forgotten his trousers when he changed out of evening dress—a detail unobserved by Miss Spice.

“At last !” she just breathed, clasping her hands.

Unfortunately, at that moment the front door opened, and her nephew stepped forth. He looked the serenader up and down.

“Well, I’m jiggered !” was the coarse expression that escaped him.

Miss Spice hastily withdrew from the casement, and began to pace the room in great agitation. What should she do ? Should she rush to the rescue ? It was all quite right in romance, of course, that her serenader should be caught in the act ; but—oh, dear ! in reality it

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was not nice. What was that ? Voices in angry altercation ? No. It was her nephew laughing—laughing ! Oh !!! how *could* he ?

Courage came of her indignation ; she ran down-stairs. The hall door stood wide open. Her nephew leaned against the doorpost, apparently in convulsions. She looked beyond, and saw, by the bright moonlight, framed in the aperture, Mr. Jellybond Tinney on the lawn, gyrating in a frantic dance.

“ Oh, Aunt Ally, dear,” Guy Spice sobbed, with laughter, “ will ye, to yer dying day, ever see the like o’ that again ! Old Tinney’s as drunk as a fiddler.”

“ Guy ! Guy ! Guy !” cried little Miss Spice, in an agonized voice ; “ it’s not *that* ! He has been smitten with madness. I know—I know he has. Do, *do*, if you love me, succor him in his affliction.”

“ You run off to bed, Aunt Ally, dear,” her nephew answered, wiping his eyes. “ I’ll take him home all right, and see to him. Don’t fret. He’ll get over it, I promise you.”

When Mr. Jellybond Tinney awoke to consciousness next day the sun was setting. He was undressed and in his own bed ; but how he got there he was not in a state to determine, mental activity being suspended for the moment by physical distress. He managed to murmur “ damn ” to himself several times ; then he rang for a drink.

The first thing he thought of when he began to revive was the witch in red ribbons, and her last remark : “ You come to me, and I’ll cure you.”

He had entered upon this last deplorable phase without intention—and he excused himself on that score ; but if he were not to be swamped by it, he would have to intend to get himself out of it. That was clear to him as he lay there, afraid to move for the pain in his head,

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and suffering also much mental distress for the pass to which he had brought himself.

Late that night he arrived at Thorne Lodge. The witch in red ribbons was seated in her dark oak parlor, dealing her cards. She drew up her slender figure, and fixed her keen dark eyes upon him contemptuously when he entered, then silently finished the deal.

"Well, you're a nice one!" she said, at last. "Are you sober by any chance?"

"Quite," he answered, meekly; "but my head's in an awful state, and I'm all tremulous."

"Come this way," she said, "and I'll give you a tonic."

He followed her into the back kitchen.

"Take off your coat and collar and neck-tie," she said, "and put your head under the tap."

He obeyed her, and she turned the water on. The cold, strong stream made him wince.

"Persevere," she commanded.

He persevered for some minutes.

"How is that?" she said, at last, turning off the water.

"Better," he answered.

She gave him a rough towel, and led the way back to the sitting-room.

"A douche is most refreshing," he remarked, pleasantly, scrubbing away hard with the towel as he spoke.

The old lady grunted.

"Look here," she said, "we're not going to have any more of this nonsense."

"I've had a nasty knock," said Mr. Jellybond Tinney.

"Don't be too hard on me."

"As if you never had a knock before!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, I've had knocks in plenty," he rejoined; "but this one was the worst of all. She refused me."

"Mrs. Kingconstance?"

"No. Miss Land."

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"Do you mean to tell me you've been wasting time on that baggage?" she demanded.

"It was on the cards," he answered, sulkily. "And it's all over, anyway. I mean to pull myself together now, and go through with the other business—if I can. But I'm not the man I was. It's luxury that demoralizes. I've gone to pieces since I took to it. My will's nowhere."

She considered him attentively.

"Six foot one, if you're an inch," she said, with withering contempt; "and no forrorder. You've no spirit, Tinney. If I'd been in your place, I'd have led the county by now."

"You would," he answered, dejectedly.

"I'm about tired of you," she pursued. "Nature made me for cities and society, and here have I been wasting precious years of my life in this hole, dangling about after you, and drove to church reg'lar twice on Sundays, for want of something better to do."

"What we enjoy here is rural felicity—" Mr. Jellybond Tinney began.

"Rural humbug," she interrupted. "You'll not get over me with your fine phrases. Don't I know when you put on that style, hey?"

Mr. Jellybond Tinney, still in his shirt-sleeves, and without collar and tie, sat in a despondent attitude, with his eyes fixed absently on the cards spread out on the table.

"I'm about tired of you, Tinney," the old lady repeated. "Either you pull yourself together now, once for all, and crown your career with a marriage and a seat in Parliament, as it's still on the cards for you to do; else you give it up, and I give it up, and you go to the devil your own way. Your luck's bound up in me. If I forsake you, you're done."

He sat a few more minutes, silently cogitating; then he got up.

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"I'll pull myself together," he said.

The handsome old lady's dark eyes gleamed, a smile irradiated her countenance.

"That's *my* man," she said.

"Yes, I'll pull myself together," he repeated, gathering strength from the resolution, and becoming more himself as he proceeded. "All is not lost, nor nearly lost, for there are still good eating and drinking ; there are laughter and pleasant talk ; there are ease of body and mind, and as good fish in the sea as the one—er—as the one that bit me. These things are not ecstasy—they are not Barbara Land ; but they are something."

A week later the county was convulsed by the news that Mrs. Kingconstance was engaged to Mr. Jellybond Tinney. Scepticism at first prevailed among the ladies ; they refused to believe. When at last it became certain that there was no mistake, a wave of hysterical emotion washed the forlorn feminine element of the neighborhood to Mr. Worringham's feet. A cruel sense of sinfulness had come upon them—they craved to confess, they demanded spiritual consolation imperatively.

The good vicar was staggered by some of the confidences he received. That Fanny Sturdy and Florence Japp should have given their hearts to the same handsome, eligible, if elderly, bachelor was not astonishing. But when Mrs. Normanton, that mother of many, attributed the bad state of her soul to a weakness of her heart ; and Lady May described her spiritual state as parlous since there had entered into her life a dearer interest than Sir Philip ; and the redundant Widow Japp boomed in her deepest bass strong hints of horrid rivalries between mother and daughter for the hand of a wretch, as a pastor of the parish he was greatly disturbed.

There was a vein of genuine sincerity in Mr. Jellybond Tinney. He was wont to say, with doubtful orig-

inality, "Never lie, sir. If you lie, where are you? But if you tell the truth, why—er—there you are!"

Acting on this principle, he had been accustomed to discuss himself and his habits with Mr. Worringham pretty openly, and the vicar had, therefore, no difficulty in fixing upon him as the cause of the ferment among the ladies. The good vicar was enjoying the ferment himself in a mild way. Half unconsciously he found in it a welcome and a rousing change from the steady monotony of his regular labors. There were days when ladies poured in upon him, seeking solace; and it was all very interesting, very interesting indeed. Sometimes there was a lady in each sitting-room waiting to consult him separately. He set his penitents various spiritual exercises, and saw to it that they were conscientiously performed. Then he turned his attention to Mr. Jellybond Tinney. He determined to take that gentleman to task and for that purpose, late one afternoon, he wended his way to the Swiss Cottage.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney, with his black eyes in the yellow stage, received him with effusion.

"Mr. Jellybond Tinney," the vicar began, somewhat sternly, "there has come to my knowledge the fact that—er—"

He stopped short, because, as usual, from the moment he came within range of Mr. Jellybond Tinney's superabundant vitality his own mood changed. When Mr. Jellybond Tinney beamed blandly upon him, he beamed in return, and things which a moment before had seemed serious assumed a trivial aspect. In Mr. Jellybond Tinney's presence the vicar's attitude of mind invariably became the attitude of one who pokes another in the ribs and playfully condones his offences with a wink.

"What is the matter, my dear sir?" Mr. Jellybond Tinney asked. "You have cause of complaint against me. Out with it—come! But, first of all, sit down here

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in the dining-room and drink my health. You never drink anything at this time of day? When do you drink? A little in the evening? Then we'll make it evening now."

He skipped to the grandfather clock and playfully put it on.

"There," he said, "the time has come. There is no time, in fact, like the present." He took some bottles out of the sideboard. "It's a poor heart that never—er—you know," he observed. "You shall have a treat, I promise you, a draught of nectar which shall renew your youth."

Mr. Worringham, who was smiling in spite of himself, watched Mr. Jellybond Tinney concoct the beverage. It took a long time. Drop by drop Mr. Jellybond Tinney distilled it from various bottles, and, as he mixed, the color of the liquid changed from one delicate tint to another, and finally resolved into the clear opaque of the opal, in which all the various shades reappeared suspended.

Mr. Worringham gazed until he became fascinated, and his eyes refused to obey him when he would have looked away.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney put the glass before him. He looked into it dreamily, then smelt it, then raised it to his lips and sipped, and, having sipped, he smiled and sipped again.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Oh, that is my secret," his host replied, jocosely. "But I may tell you that only for one other person in this neighborhood have I ever mixed that draught. That person is my lady. Her health!"

He raised his own glass and drank.

"Her health!" said the vicar, and did the same. "Your healths together!" he added, and emptied the glass.

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In silence, for a moment, he contemplated it, and then, very shyly, he pushed it towards his host.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney did not take the hint.

"You wanted to see me," he said, breaking the pause.

"Yes," Mr. Worringham answered. "These women—"

He spoke impatiently.

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Jellybond Tinney. "They've been worrying about my marriage, I suppose. But what difference can that make to them?"

"Well, I hope it will make this difference," said Mr. Worringham, whose tongue was singularly loosened for once. "In fact—er—you must give up making love to them."

"But, my dear sir," Mr. Jellybond Tinney remonstrated, "that is my way of making myself agreeable. When I think of the paucity of men in this country—of all those who are drafted off as soldiers and sailors, for instance—and of these poor, dear women pining for them, I could turn Mohammedan, my dear sir. Tut! tut! I could indeed."

Mr. Jellybond Tinney was so overcome with sympathy and indignation that he had to wipe his eyes.

"What has a woman to look forward to in life but her love-time," he proceeded—"her little love-time? It's soon over, I assure you—the best part of it. Women should all be allowed an aftermath of sentiment. It would really be better for most women if they had two husbands—one to minister to their spiritual necessities and their aspirations exclusively, and the other for the usual better-and-worse-till-death-us-do-part business. Ladies we know here in this neighborhood are quite satisfied with their husbands *as* husbands; but the diviner side of their natures was starved until *I* came. What was my rôle? Why, benefactor of my species. The homes that I have made happy, the homes in which

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discontent once reigned, are—er—numerous, I assure you. Women, women especially. There is only one way to benefit women. Love them. I love them all! Short or tall, fat or lean, ugly or beautiful, I love them, and I make love to them. Poor dears!" he exclaimed. "I should like to marry them all!"

"O fie!" said Mr. Worringham, shaking a playful finger at him.

"If it were moral," Mr. Jellybond Tinney added, impressively.

"Admirable sentiment," said the vicar, caught by the word moral. "You always do the right thing—yes, yes. I can trust you. But you're too fond of your joke, perhaps."

"Many a true word may be spoken in—er—an undertone," Mr. Jellybond Tinney assured him.

The vicar assented to this with a nod. Then he rose, looked at the empty glass a moment regretfully, then gave it another little push towards his host.

But Mr. Jellybond Tinney was wisely obdurate.

For even as it was, the gentle vicar never knew how he got home.

Little Miss Spice had been in a state of exaltation ever since the night of the serenade. Florence Japp took her the news of Mr. Jellybond Tinney's perfidy.

"Do you understand it?" Florence demanded, her dark, handsome face blotched with restrained emotion.

"Yes, I understand it," Ally said, solemnly. "He is mad. I tell you, for I know. I know that he is mad."

She met Mr. Jellybond Tinney by accident one evening, on the very spot on which they had met on that never-to-be-forgotten summer evening when—oh, dear! when he was not mad.

They shook hands.

He looked into her eyes reproachfully.

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"Ally," he said, "I still await your kind congratulations."

"Mr. Jellybond Tinney," she replied, and to her dying day she could recall just how she said it—"Mr. Jellybond Tinney, I cannot congratulate you, for I do not consider you a responsible person at the present moment. Had you been yourself, you would never, no, you would never have given your hand where your heart can never be."

"Oh, Ally! you make me a responsible being again for a moment," he ejaculated, raising his eyes to the evening sky. "How ineffectual is the human and finite reason of man! how sublime the woman's divine intuition! Good-bye, Ally!"

He held out his hand.

She gave him hers.

He clasped it to his heart a moment, and during that moment there came to her that soothing sense of inevitability which takes the sting from untoward circumstances and makes blame an injustice.

Thus was her hero restored to little Miss Spice, a victim of fate. Victims of fate were they both—he, smitten as he was by that strange malady; she, bereft of all—all but the happy past.

CHAPTER XLIV

BABS took Barbara's departure philosophically enough; but once she was gone Babs missed her. Insensibly, just by being herself, Barbara had influenced her pupil; but neither of them was aware of the fact. So Barbara made her escape from Dane Court gladly, because the sense of failure weighed upon her; and Babs felt her loss without knowing what it was that particularly depressed her. Barbara had made her keep regular hours, and do a certain amount of work every day; and the occupation, although often irksome, was always a distraction. Now she had absolutely nothing to do that she must do. She sang a little, read a little, rode, walked, loitered about—for the most part loitered about, restlessly; and the old yearning ache at her heart grew ever more importunate. Montacute was still at home, but they were no longer close companions, as they used to be. Always precocious, he had now quite ceased to be a boy. In another year he would be of age, and he had already begun to interest himself in his property. The way in which he had taken the announcement of his mother's engagement to Mr. Jellybond Tinney had been a surprise to everybody. Mrs. Kingconstance had thought it necessary to excuse herself, to assume an apologetic tone.

"My dear mother, why shouldn't you marry him if you like?" Montacute asked. "I'm sure he's not a bad old boy. You've nearly done with me, you know, and it's a good thing you've found some one to take care of



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you. It's your turn to be taken care of now. My minority must have been a long, trying business to you, and such a tie, besides, keeping you here at Dane Court so long. I congratulate you."

Mrs. Kingconstance understood him. She knew what he meant by the cruel contraction of her heart, the pang of the mother dismissed.

"Thank you, dear Cute," she said, with a dry sob and a perfunctory kiss. "Of course, when you're of age, you'll want your house to yourself."

"Oh, but equally of course you won't turn out in any hurry," he replied, magnanimously. "Naturally my house is my mother's as long as it suits her to live in it."

It did not escape her that he left her with a light step, glad to have got the business settled; and she was deeply wounded. He had given her notice to go, her only son, to go from the home of her husband, the home of the best years of her life, the home she had made a happy one for him. She would in any case have offered to go when he came of age, as a matter of course; he need not have turned her out. She had certainly done well to accept Mr. Jellybond Tinney.

Julia was furious about her mother's engagement. "You might at least have waited until I was married, mamma," she said; "or, at all events, if you must marry at your age, you need not have married beneath you."

Miss Kingconstance merely shrugged her shoulders.

"You don't think it foolish, Lorraine?" Mrs. Kingconstance asked, deprecatingly.

"No," her sister-in-law answered. "I think it quite natural. Why shouldn't you be happy in your own way? I wish to goodness *I* had had the sense to make my life for myself, instead of letting it be marred by other people. However, it is not too late!"

She smiled to herself as at some pleasant prospect.

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She had struck out for herself in a new direction during these last few years. Much of her time was now spent in London, where she did something vague which had had the happy effect of restoring her youth. A purpose in life had increased her vitality; she was all energy now, and interest—a new woman.

Babs had no feeling whatever on the subject of her mother's marriage. Old Jellybond had always been about within her recollection, and it did not seem to her that it made the slightest difference whether her mother married him or not.

"So long as he does not assume papa airs with me, I don't mind," was all that she said.

In those days she did not care about anything really but Cadenhouse. She often dreamed at night that the light from the tower was streaming in upon her, and started up, wide awake, only to find her room in darkness; and then she would lie awake, and toss and toss feverishly for hours.

"I must care for him greatly," she said to herself.

At last, one night, before she had slept at all, and just when she was thinking least about it, on a sudden the glow-worm radiance illumined her room. She was not startled. The light had the effect of a tender message, gently delivered. Her whole being was suffused by something analogous in the way of emotion, a certain sort of gladness that had some indefinable characteristic in common with the light.

"He is there," she said to herself, "there at last—just across the valley. But oh! what miles away that means! Oh, to be back in the old days when I dared to go to the tower. When shall we meet? When *shall* we meet? And where? and where?"

She could not sleep that night, she could not rest next day. All life had been resolved into a cruel ache of expectation.

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"I can't stand this long, you know," she said to herself. "If I don't end it, it will end me."

At first she stayed in-doors ; then she took to wandering about. Sometimes she rode an impossible distance, and sometimes she walked. But she never went near the tower.

One afternoon she called upon Ally Spice and confided in her, as she had been wont to do all her life ; and the dear little woman had made her take tea and hot buttered toast, and had comforted her.

"I know, I know, my dear," she said. "I've been through it all myself, and it hurts, the heartache hurts. Fate was against *us*, but I seem to see that it is not against you. It will all come right, my dear. I seem to see that it will."

It was on that evening, as Babs walked home alone, that they met at last.

Cadenhouse was coming from Dane Court, riding thoughtfully. He was taken unawares, and looked at her a moment before he recognized her, then gravely raised his hat and passed on. Always before he had dismounted when they met, and turned back with her, leading his horse.

At dinner that night Miss Kingconstance was looking unusually well.

"What's the matter?" Babs asked her, irritably. "You are all irradiated, as if you were lighted up inside by electricity."

"I am," said Miss Kingconstance. "I'm happy."

They had walked together that day, she and Cadenhouse, down the green alleys of the park, talking long and earnestly. He was on his way back from a formal call at Dane Court when he overtook her. He had made that call on his return from abroad as the best way of bridging over the episode between himself and Babs.

"May I compliment you on your appearance, Lor-

rairie?" he said, when he had dismounted and they had shaken hands. "The last time we walked here together I was alarmed for you; but now you look yourself again."

She smiled at him.

"I cannot return the compliment," she said; "for you are not looking at all yourself as I have hitherto known you."

Cadenhouse adjusted his horse's rein on his arm, but made no answer. She saw, however, that he had heard what she said, and was considering her words.

"Yes, you have changed," she continued; "and upon the whole, I like the change. You have come down to earth. Your habit was to hold yourself too much aloof from your fellow-creatures."

"I do not like the change myself," he said. "I hope to change back again. The truth is, I had a bad fall, and was much shaken, but now I am recovering."

"Alas!" sighed Miss Kingconstance. "You of all men who might do so much good here below if only you would spare us a little time from the perfecting of your own soul! You are inconsistent, Cadenhouse. You ought not, with your ideas, to be a rich man."

"I grant that I should not use riches for myself," he answered. "But in this age, what would it profit the cause of happiness if I became a beggar? I would fain make the whole world happy, but the only world I can get at is the little world on my own estate. Still, if every man did as much as I—"

He broke off, for the thought, as it found expression, was somewhat self-righteous.

More than once a qualm of this kind had come to disturb him lately. He had certainly done his duty generously on his own estates; but, except for that, he had taken no part in the life of the place, neither as an active agent nor as an onlooker. He knew practically

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nothing at all about his neighbors. He had lived the life of a recluse—looking up—allowing his splendid influence and great personal *prestige* to lapse, unexercised. Mr. Jellybond Tinney might lord it over the ladies about him, Miss Spice's good little heart might be broken, Miss Kingconstance might suffer the martyrdom of an aimless existence until her brilliant wits went wrong, and Babs he made impossible forever; and Cadencehouse, left to himself, cultivating compassion up there in his high tower, holding himself secluded in an atmosphere of heavenly thought, the most ecstatic atmosphere of all, would have sailed on into eternity serenely unaware of these catastrophes. And he had come back now fully prepared to take up the old life just where it had been interrupted by the intrusion of human nature in the seductive person of Babs the Impossible. His seclusion was all the more to be regretted because the man was extraordinary. He said so little, yet, wherever he had been, there remained, so long as the recollection of his words weighed with those who heard them, that strange expansion of heart, that beautiful release from weariful thought which is happiness. A man with this particular power wrongs the world to a criminal extent if, for purposes of his own, he limits the sphere of his influence by seeking seclusion.

They had walked on together in silence after that last remark.

As usual, when she was with him, a great calm had fallen upon Miss Kingconstance. Babs was a little human being, with body, soul, and spirit all battling in her at once, each claiming its separate satisfaction. The life of suppression which had been forced on Miss Kingconstance had made her dependent upon her intellect for such solace as she could grasp; her other attributes had died of atrophy for want of exercise. But intellect without spirituality is like affection without

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kindness ; it does not warm the heart. Therefore her companionship was grateful to Cadenhouse just at this moment, when all his energy was directed towards suppressing in himself that which had responded so unexpectedly to the human nature of Babs.

" You say I am looking myself again, Cadenhouse," Miss Kingconstance ventured, after a long pause. " Do you know why ? Do you know to what I owe the happy change ?"

" No," he answered.

" To you—to your influence."

He looked straight ahead of him, reflecting.

" I am glad," he said ; but she could see that he was puzzled.

" Is it so slight a thing to you to release a fellow-creature from the curse of madness that you do not even know when you exercise the power ?" she asked.

" But you were never mad, Lorraine !" he answered, startled.

" I was mad. I was suffering from morbid self-consciousness. Day and night I thought only of myself—of my own tragic condition. I was devoured with rage and hate and bitterness. Our good old vicar was the first to help me. He said something to me once by which I afterwards profited—afterwards, when you had taken me out of myself. I complained to him one day. ' You give no sympathy,' he said. ' I get so little,' I answered. ' It is not the sympathy we receive ourselves but the sympathy we expend upon others that avails to help us,' " he replied.

Cadenhouse hitched up the bridle on his arm and looked on ahead.

" Do you feel that ?" said Miss Kingconstance.

" It may be so," he said.

" I told him I was mad," she pursued. " ' No, no, you are not mad,' he said. ' Madness is disease of the

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brain, organic disease. Your malady is disease of the moral nature. You have brought it on yourself ; you can cure yourself !' ' How ?' I asked. But that was all he could do for me. He answered with the usual platitudes. Then you came. Perhaps you remember the day. ' The first germ of disease was propagated in a malicious mind by an evil thought,' you said. ' What a pity our doctors don't pursue that line of research !' I exclaimed. That set me off. Do you understand how ?"

" Yes," he answered ; " for I have observed that the mind once interested in ethical subjects is apt to pursue them."

" Cadenhouse," she broke out, passionately, " do you think it right to live the life of a recluse, to shelter yourself from contact with the world when in you lies such power to help ?"

Cadenhouse looked on ahead, but did not answer.

She left the question to work.

" That was the beginning of the change in me," she recommenced. " That day you restored me to mental health, and started me on the career of usefulness that has saved me. I feel that I have missed the great good of a woman's life in that I have not married. Marriage is the most perfect state ; but still—"

All at once he saw her from a new point of view. That a woman could feel herself wronged because celibacy had been forced upon her, that it could be contrary to her nature, was a possibility that had never before occurred to him, so steeped was he in the contorted theories of life which were dear to the morbid mediævalist. Looking down at her from this new point of view, he was struck with the fact that the slender, elegant, daintily dressed creature beside him was an attractive woman.

" But — if I may venture without impertinence,"

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slipped from him, "why shouldn't you marry, Lorraine?"

"Why don't you marry, Cadenhouse?" she said, laughing to cover a momentary embarrassment.

Once more he looked on ahead, and once more she left the suggestion to do its work.

CHAPTER XLV

IF the cries of our hearts could be heard, the rocks would be rent with compassion. But the ears of the flesh were deceived by the ominous stillness which had settled upon Babs in those days. For the first time in her life her chatter had ceased. Walking, she carried herself with a new dignity—shoulders back, head erect, countenance proudly set. At table, too, she sat stiffly, drawn up to her full height, and answered when addressed, but seldom joined in the conversation or volunteered a remark. They all thought that her sudden haughtiness of demeanor was the consequence of the Jellybond Tinney affair.

“It will do her good, then, that is all that I can say,” Mrs. Kingconstance observed to her sister-in-law, complacently, “if it makes her remember at last who she is.”

Miss Kingconstance smiled. The notion of a mother marrying beneath her in order to arouse a proper pride of birth in her daughter appealed to her sense of humor; but she said nothing. Her soul was blossoming into beauty in those days. Her wit was no longer acrid. The hope in her heart made summer in her life, and under its genial influence her whole nature had ripened into sweetness.

But Babs’s attitude was in no way the consequence of the Jellybond Tinney business. She was absorbed in her own affairs, that was all. “Cadenhouse! Cadenhouse! Cadenhouse!” was the cry of her heart day and night; and not all her latent strength of character,

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which she did her best to summon to the task from the secret recesses of her being, availed to stifle it. She had felt herself slighted by the coldness of his salutation when at last they met, and had drawn herself up, proudly resentful; and so she had remained, but only outwardly. Inwardly she humbled herself in the dust before him, and her heart went out to him entreating, imploring: "Cadenhouse! Cadenhouse! Cadenhouse!"

One day he had come to lunch, and on that occasion she had borne herself bravely, rattling on as had been her wont. No one would have suspected that she had to make a mighty effort to recapture her old self; but it seemed to her that Cadenhouse saw through the pose, knew she was suffering, and remained cold and calm and indifferent. The thing which takes the light out of life is the eye, become critical, which was once affectionate and admiring. Babs was stung to desperation.

"It can't go on like this, you know," she said to herself.

When she made her escape from the table she rushed headlong out of the house, and on and on until she came to a secluded spot on the Wyldeholme property, where the bank sloped down to the rivulet on the one side and up again on the other steeply, and all humanity was blotted out by the trees that crested the ridge. Here the influences—the bird-calls and the murmur of running water, the flutter of dainty butterflies and the intermittent hum of the bees—were all sweet natural influences, and gently persuasive.

She sat her down in the shade, her back resting against an old gnarled tree, her elbows on her knees, her face between her hands, and gazed down, woebegone, into the running water. "Cadenhouse! Cadenhouse! Cadenhouse!" came the cry of her heart, reproachfully. How could he talk so placidly to her aunt when she was there? How could he be so indifferent to her, or pre-

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tend to be? "Cadenhouse! Cadenhouse! Cadenhouse!" came the cry of her heart, entreatingly. "Give me one more chance!"

Suddenly she became aware of the water. Its babble became importunate. Thought suspended itself involuntarily; she found herself listening. She tried to make out a message for herself in the inarticulate gurgle. But always when she seemed on the point of success something distracted her attention for a moment. Once it was a cockchafer to be beaten off; once a booming bumble-bee busy among the meadow-sweet; and once a bird said something indistinct. Thus, by degrees, the wholesome influences of the place took possession of her. The solitude, the summer sounds, the warmth and sweetness, all made for soothing. The tension of her high-strung nerves relaxed. She looked about her, she stretched her cramped limbs. She felt far from the world. Even her trouble took on an aspect of remoteness, as if it had happened in some by-gone age and mattered little now.

"Cadenhouse," she sighed to herself, loving the very name.

Nature she also loved, for everywhere in nature was Cadenhouse.

The sunlight crept through the leaves and rested on her head. She looked about for a shadier spot. Beneath the trees the grass had been recently cut, and was now piled up in little heaps of hay. She collected enough to make a bed for herself, and a pillow; then she took off her hat and settled herself at full length, her head resting on her arm, her eyes on the running water. The influences of the hour became importunate. Her eyelids flickered, fell, and were finally sealed in sleep.

She made a pretty picture lying there, a picture of perfect girlish beauty—shell-pink and pearl-white, sensitive, refined, intelligent. The sun sought her out once

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more, peeping through the leaves, then sent a happy ray to light her.

A young man who was loitering past at the moment saw the ray fall from the foliage, and followed it with idle eye to its resting-place.

"Just the nook for a nymph," he said to himself, stopping short. "And what a set for a play, lime-light and all ! I must make a note of it for Oliver !"

He took out a note-book, and drew a horizontal line which he labelled " nymph " ; some vertical lines which he called " trees " ; a diagonal line for " lime-light " ; a few scratches for " bank " ; and some flourishes for " water."

As he closed the book Babs opened her eyes.

She looked at him unintelligently for a moment, then she took her arm from under her head and sat up. As she did so she uttered an exclamation.

" My arm's asleep," she explained.

" Let me help you," he said, holding out his hand.

" Don't come within a mile of me," she cried, with a wry laugh. " It's in the stage of pins and needles now. It'll pass off in a moment."

As she spoke it occurred to her that the young man standing there looking down upon her, whom she was taking into her confidence so completely and unaffectedly, was an absolute stranger.

She looked up at him to consider him in this new light.

" I wonder if, by any chance, you are Jeffrey Wylde ?" she said, slowly rubbing her arm as she spoke.

" At your service," he answered, taking off his hat with a pleasant smile. " But you have the advantage of me."

" I am Lorraine Kingconstance," she replied.

" Lorraine," he repeated, a little puzzled. " Babs, perhaps ?"

" Yes, Babs," she said.

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Then they smiled at each other, and the introduction was complete.

"I am trying to recollect you," he said. "You were a baby when I went away."

"Not quite," she said, "for I remember you. Only I thought you were immensely tall."

"And you find me disappointingly short?"

"Oh no," she answered; "a happy medium."

Again he raised his hat and smiled.

"I'm trespassing, I suppose," she said. "We've been in the habit of overrunning your property in your absence, and taking tea with old Grimwood when it pleased us. Do you mind?"

"On the contrary," he answered, "I hope you will always overrun my property, and take tea with old Grimwood when it pleases you. Why not come now?"

"Why not?" she said.

She had risen, and was putting on her hat. He watched her admiringly. The attitude accentuated the slender lines of her figure. Her every movement was graceful.

Jeffrey Wylde was short, fair, dapper, with a cultivated voice and a gently caressing manner. Voice and manner together suggested refinement of mind; but the suggestion was fallacious. His only refinement was of the senses. Coarse-flavored food can be refined to the palate in the cooking, but the substance is the same; and in the same way a coarse mind can be disguised by tricks of manner—for a time. Sooner or later the disguise becomes irksome and is cast aside. The key to Jeffrey Wylde's character was to be found in the monstrosity of a mustache which he wore.

As they strolled on together towards the house he asked after various people in the neighborhood. In replying, Babs happened to mention some notable eccentricity in each.

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"Are they all such oddities?" he exclaimed, at last.

"Yes, we're all rather queer hereabouts," said Babs. "Privilege of ancient families, you know. You'll be queer, too, when you've been here long enough. Mamma's the only one of us who isn't queer—and Julia. But then, of course, mamma isn't one of us. But, anyway, they're both uninteresting, and both provoking—mamma, I mean, and Julia. It is mamma's laziness that provokes me. I am all energy myself. I must always be doing, doing, doing—something. Julia is provoking in another way. There are some people who do things and do them well, and you are glad for them that they can; but there are other people who do the same things and make you feel you hate them for it. It is because they put such an exorbitant value upon their own little achievements, I think. It is a fine nature that is not offensive in the hour of triumph. Julia is so puffed up with her own conceit she makes you feel she is boasting herself superior."

Jeffrey made a mental note of this remark. He mistook it for an indication of petty jealousy.

"Is Julia also beautiful?" he asked.

"I think her so," Babs answered. "Then, also, she is accomplished. She is a good musician and a good linguist, and draws and paints well. In fact, anything she does she does well."

Jeffrey mistook this praise for an overdone attempt to cover the self-betrayal of the previous criticism.

"And what do you do?" he asked.

"Oh, I do all the appreciation. I'm audience, I'm chorus, I'm everything that's encouraging to others in the family circle. And I contend that, in my own way, I'm useful."

"You're clever, too, I should say, if I may."

"No, I'm not clever, I'm—what's the word? I can see into things; but set me down to a book and my head

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buzzes. I hate books and pictures and art and all manufactures directly I'm asked to understand them."

"What do you like, then?"

"Oh, the things I like are—fresh air, and the smell of the earth after rain, and the freedom of animals—their gambols, their healthiness and happiness. Do I explain myself? I expect you will despise me; but the cattle in the meadows, and the awkwardness of the calves, and the hares on their hind-legs, nosing round for their enemies, and the bunnies at sunset feeding, and all on the alert for surprises—these things touch some chord of delight in me that makes paint on canvas, poetry on paper, and all your other arts no more to me than a wax flower is to the real red rose. These things"—she indicated all nature with a wave of her hand—"these things include me, you see; they make *me* part of the poem."

"But," he began, tentatively, "if Nature in the abstract moves you so much, what joy will there be left for Nature in the concrete to give you?"

"What do you mean by Nature in the concrete?"

"I mean love."

"Ah—love!" she said, softly. "With Nature in the abstract I am on the earth, of course; but when Nature in the concrete comes—then I shall have wings."

There was a pause. Her thoughts flew to Cadenhouse. Jeffrey was trying to place her. Was she simple or was she deep? Was she fast or was she foolish? He was ready to believe her to be both.

He knew human nature only from the point of view of the little clique within a clique which calls itself Society. He had learned the life of courtesans and money-grubbers, learned to live promiscuously, as society lives, and lost his respect for women and his faith in men. All that was subtle and complex in Babs was of necessity incomprehensible to this conventional sort of society man.

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"Babs," he began again.

Babs started from her reverie.

"I am puzzled," he pursued. "You never read, you say, you do not profess to think. Then whence comes all this flow of language?"

"From my heart, I should imagine," she answered, readily; "seeing that I have no soul—so they say."

"Ah! so you're going to set up a heart," he observed. "Don't. Take my advice. Have a good time if you like, and talk heart; but don't put your own into anything. It will hurt if you do."

"Somehow the sentiment jars," said Babs.

They were within sight of the house.

"Go on," she added. "I'll follow you."

In some surprise he obeyed. Then it occurred to him that she wanted her coming to appear to be accidental, that she felt some impropriety in the proceeding; and, smiling to himself, he believed that he quite understood the young lady.

Babs, meanwhile, was innocently wrestling with a broken boot-lace. She had on a pair of high boots, and in a fit of girlish prudery she had sent him on that she might be alone to tie the lace herself, for she feared he would see it was loose and over-politely insist upon tying it for her.

He met her on the steps.

"Grimwood is out," he said; "but you will come in all the same, I hope. I have ordered tea in the library."

He did not know if Grimwood were out or not. He, a purely conventional type, judging Babs by conventional standards, had found her wanting, and was taking advantage of her in the conventional way.

"You don't mind having tea with me alone?" he asked.

"I shall be delighted," Babs answered, indifferently.

They made merry together over the teacups. Babs

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was taken out of herself for the moment, and talked as she had been wont to talk to Cadenhouse and St. Lambert—talked until she became intoxicated with talk. A remark of Jeffrey's pulled her up short.

"You're a horrid little flirt, Babs, are you not?" he ventured. "How many times have you been engaged already?"

"Is that the kind of question that may be asked?" Babs exclaimed, quick to resent the impertinence.

"It is the kind of question one may ask one's intimates," he answered, a trifle disconcerted.

"I can scarcely expect to be numbered among your intimates yet," she said.

"I apologize," he replied. "With some people one passes through no preliminary stage of acquaintance. One seems to know them all at once. I could have talked to you about anything a moment ago; now I feel horribly snubbed."

"What could make you ask such a question?" Babs expostulated. "I was all at my ease with you before; now I feel all on my guard. I don't know why. I never felt like that with Sir Owen St. Lambert, never!"

"He's an old fogey, isn't he?"

Babs bridled visibly.

"Might I venture without impertinence to suppose he was an admirer of yours?"

In spite of herself, Babs smiled. The reaction from the cruel tension of so many days left her liable to rapid emotional changes.

"I miss him frightfully," she declared. "*He* is one of the people you can talk to about anything, if you like. He never says the wrong thing or does the wrong thing—"

"Only petted you when you were in the mood, I suppose?" Jeffrey ventured.

Babs dissolved in merriment.

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"I am thinking of the day we parted," she explained. "What sort of soap do you use?" I shall never get over that! If it had been Cadenhouse—"

Jeffrey pricked up his ears at the name. He had mistaken her apparently irrelevant laughter for mere levity.

"Babs," he said, with mock solemnity, "am I to understand that you have been trifling with Cadenhouse?"

"No," she answered, rattling out the first thing that occurred to her to cover the confusion which was caused by the mere sound of his name. "Cadenhouse trifled with me."

"This is serious," said Jeffrey, shaking his head. "I really think I ought to improve the occasion."

"Oh, improve it, if you know how!" Babs answered, at random.

She was sitting in the corner of the sofa with the tea-table in front of her. Jeffrey sat down beside her, thus hemming her in. He looked into her face quizzically. Half laughing, half embarrassed, she returned his gaze.

"Babs," he said, "trifling with me is nothing. *I'm* no saint. But when it comes to Cadenhouse—"

"I think," said Babs, with sudden stiffness—"I think we will leave Lord Cadenhouse out of the argument."

"With all my heart," said Jeffrey. "Do you know that that is the only nice thing you have said to me? I must thank you for it."

He took her hand. Babs tried to snatch it away, but he held it fast.

"Such a pretty little hand—made to be kind," he said, and pressed it to his lips.

Alarmed and indignant by this time, Babs jumped up, knocked over the tea-table, scattering the china in all directions, wrenched herself from his grasp, and made for the door. It opened as she reached it, and she came into violent collision with Squire Normanton.



"SHE CAME INTO VIOLENT COLLISION WITH SQUIRE NORMANTON"

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"I beg your pardon," she said, recovering herself.

"I came to call on Jeffrey," the squire explained; "but it seems he is engaged."

He looked from the young man to the broken china and grinned.

Babs made her escape.

"You'll think me a damned nuisance, I expect," the squire proceeded. "But surely, you know, this is coming it a little too strong, eh? A young lady in the county, and all that sort of thing, don't you know?"

"Oh, she's all right," Jeffrey answered, easily. "She came to see old Grimwood. She didn't know I'd come back. Grim was out, and tea was ready. Of course I asked her to come in, and of course she came in without any affectation or nonsense. You must remember I knew her in her cradle. And just as you arrived I knocked over the tea-table by an awkward accident, and she made for the door to call for help—"

"I see," said Squire Normanton, and passed on easily to other things.

"My dear," he said to his wife when he went home, "don't let the girls associate with Babs more than you can help. She's coming it altogether too strong. I always said she was cut out to be about as bad as they make 'em."

"What's she been doing now?" Mrs. Normanton asked.

Squire Normanton gave her his own version of the story, which was altogether to the discredit of Babs. And that was the version which was known by the end of the week to every matron in the county.

CHAPTER XLVI

JEFFREY called next day at Dane Court and made Julia's acquaintance. Babs did not appear. Julia displayed her mind to the best advantage, the mediocre mind in whose grudging praise there is always a note of detraction. They understood each other at once.

Julia came into the category of fine girl—tall, slender, upright without stiffness, self-contained, bearing herself haughtily to inferiors, affably with her equals, acknowledging no superior. She spoke of Babs in a patronizing tone.

"Babs is so erratic," she remarked.

Afterwards Jeffrey said to himself :

"Miss Julia would do to marry ; but for fun give me Babs ! By Jove ! not a bad idea," he proceeded. "When two sisters are each eligible in their way, marry the right one, and then there's the other always at hand, and it's all in the family. It's time I married."

He made the reflection over his wine after dinner, and it was quite characteristic of him that he should make up his mind in that way, for he was a methodical person upon the whole. He took things in regular rotation—duty, business, love. For many years now he had always carried a little letter in his breast-pocket—not the same letter, by any means ; not even written in the same handwriting. The writers had been taken in rotation with the rest of his life. At the end of the day's doings, while he was enjoying his last cigar, it had been

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his habit to take out the little letter of the time-being and read it ; and usually, as he did so, the expression of his countenance was a compound of sentimental tenderness and egregious self-complacency. But when he had read his little letter on this occasion his attitude was altered. A wood fire was smouldering upon the hearth. He threw the little letter down on the hot embers and watched it burn. His mind was made up.

Julia's mind was also made up.

"He'll do," she said to herself that night, in the retirement of her own chamber. "I'll have every penny of my own money settled on myself, however, in case of accidents."

Miss Kingconstance, also in her own room, glowed and was glad at that moment, fresh from another walk and talk with Cadenhouse.

Babs was tossing about on her bed—writhing—deeply humiliated ; and always, from her heart, went up a cry to Cadenhouse, a cry for help.

Down-stairs Montacute was talking to Guy Spice. He had made Guy Spice his secretary, and the talk now was of a tour round the world.

Far away in the East, St. Lambert was reading a letter from Barbara Land. It was in answer to one from him.

"I have always loved you, my guardian," it ran. "I thought I had lost you. But I bore myself with what courage I could for your sake, and did, to the best of my ability, the arduous duty you imposed upon me. How was it you never suspected how arduous it was ? You tell me that you realize now what a mistake it would have been, and I need not therefore any longer disguise the fact that I thought it so all along. But do not let us think about that business any more. My night of weeping is over and done with, and now, now I arise for a glad new day of song."

St. Lambert kissed the letter.

"What a fool I very nearly was!" he muttered.

In those days Mr. Jellybond Tinney gave a quiet little dinner-party. Jeffrey Wylde and Cadenhouse were the first to arrive. They met on the threshold, and no sooner had they alighted than the hall door opened of itself. A shining device pointed the way to the cloak-room. There were no servants to be seen. Jeffrey and Cadenhouse lingered a little in the cloak-room, talking.

"This gentleman has a perfect genius for mechanical contrivances," Cadenhouse remarked.

"Yes, he's a clever fellow," Jeffrey rejoined. "Do you know anything about him?"

"He's a man of means, I believe," Cadenhouse replied, with his usual haughty indifference.

"But his family—where does he come from?"

"Ah, that I do not know."

"Does he remind you of any one?"

"Now you mention it, yes. His voice reminds me—but I can't think of what."

"It's his voice that puzzles me, too. I feel as if I'd heard that voice a hundred times. He's an interesting fellow. A cad if you like; but then such a royal cad, a regular eighteen-carat cad without alloy. I suppose you condone that, seeing that you are here."

"I am here to-night as a duty," said Cadenhouse. "Partly for political purposes—he is to stand as conservative candidate, you know. But also because of the approaching marriage."

"Oh, that is what has brought you down from your high tower, is it?" said Jeffrey. "And quite enough too. I have the very strongest objection to such a *mésalliance*. I cannot think how a woman of position like Mrs. Kingconstance could pick up with that sort of person."

"I never thought about it—I was really indifferent,"

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said Cadenhouse. "But I understand now that feeling in the county is so strongly against it that, if he persists—or Mrs. Kingconstance persists—it will lose him the election. And it is believed that the lady will be the lesser loss of the two. I am anxious that he should not persist, because I think him the best man for political purposes ; and also, now that the matter has been represented to me, I do see objections to the marriage."

Mr. Worringham and Squire Normanton completed the party. The service of the table was done deftly by strange waiters. The dinner was superb—not too much in quantity, consequently not too long ; and most excellent in quality. Under its stimulating influence, even Cadenhouse's habitual haughty reserve melted into something like geniality. Mr. Jellybond Tinney as a host was in his element. The certainty that he was under observation did not embarrass him, but rather gave zest to the part he was playing. His imagination was Oriental, and he brought it to bear upon all his guests. When in the vein, his insight was infinite. Knowing, as he did, how to ingratiate himself with crowds at a time, it was mere child's play to him, this party, now that he had got it together. The difficulty had been to get them together—the much-loved vicar, the proud recluse, the whiskeyfied squire, and the conventional society man. In that he had succeeded, however, and now it but remained to bind them to him. With these men in the hollow of his hand, he would have the key to the county.

By the time the coffee came and the cigars, he was pretty sure of them all—sure, at least, that he had pleased them as an entertainer ; but before they left the table he meant to make a bid for their permanent allegiance.

"Instead of liqueurs, I propose to offer you a little concoction of my own with your coffee," he said. "It

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is really rather nice. Mr. Worringham, I appeal to you."

The vicar's eyes brightened.

"Are you alluding to that delicious cordial you gave me once—and only once? Why, it was—it was nectar!"

"So glad you liked it," said Mr. Jellybond Tinney.

On the table before him were some crystal goblets, and the exquisite little decanters which had played such an important part in the subjugation of Mrs. Kingconstance.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney began to manipulate the decanters.

"I don't talk or encourage talking when I am doing this," he said, "for fear of making mistakes. A drop too much makes all the difference."

He talked, nevertheless, the whole time, keeping up a monotonous monologue to which his guests found themselves obliged to listen in silence. They sat watching him, with their eyes fixed upon the shining goblets; and the longer they gazed the more fascinated they became. A gentle apathy stole over them, a sense of soothing which seemed to be the effect of the monotonous monologue.

It was a long business. Drop by drop Mr. Jellybond Tinney distilled the mixture, and every drop he added altered the tint a trifle, so that the liquid passed by slight gradations through exquisite gem-like shades of transparent color; but when at last he handed them their glasses it looked like watered milk.

Simultaneously they raised their glasses and sipped. The effect of the first sip on Jeffrey and Cadenhouse was identical. They instantly raised their glasses again, and tasted the draught as men do who think there is something to question. They exchanged glances. Mr. Jellybond Tinney looked smilingly at them. He was busy mixing another supply.

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"Drink, gentlemen," he said. "The effect is spoiled if you sip."

All drank. Mr. Jellybond Tinney's countenance betrayed some inward satisfaction.

"Your glasses, gentlemen," he said, after a little pause. It was noticeable that the new brew had been mixed in less than a third the time it had taken to concoct the other.

Dreamily the gentlemen handed him their glasses. Again he filled them with the delicious mixture. It was the color of a fire opal by this time.

"Now sip," he said.

When they had done so, each man sat silently looking into his glass, with sensuous satisfaction on his face.

"I've done all this before," Cadenhouse suddenly exclaimed.

"So have I," said Jeffrey—"not once, but many times."

"Faith, I wish I had," murmured the squire.

"My second experience," the vicar boasted.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney glanced slowly round the table, and, as his eye fell upon each in turn, each found himself suffused with a singular respect for him. Cadenhouse was the last to come under his control ; but finally he too fell like the rest.

Late that night Guy Spice went out for an airing before he retired to rest. He was loitering along, smoking his pipe and enjoying the lovely night, when all at once he saw a sight which caused him to stop short and stand and stare like one transfixed.

By the light of the moon, which was at the full, he saw approaching down the broad high-road, arm-in-arm, five gentlemen in evening dress. They were dancing. Three steps to the right they took, then three steps to the left ; three steps forward ; a momentary pause to

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throw up the right leg, then off again. And all with the most perfect gravity, all in the most absolute silence.

As they passed him he recognized them ; but only one of them took the slightest notice of him, the tall one in the middle, upon whose will the other four hung by their arms, two on each side, in helpless dependence. And that one joined in the shout of laughter with which Guy Spice signified his appreciation of the performance.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE day after it had been announced that Mr. Jellybond Tinney was to stand for the county in the conservative interest, every hoarding was placarded with the question: "Who's Tinney Binks?"

"Who is Tinney Binks?" everybody asked.

After an interval the reply appeared everywhere, on hand-bills and hoardings, gorgeously displayed.

TINNEY BINKS!!!

THE MOST VERSATILE ENTERTAINER OF HIS DAY,
THE GREAT MESMERIST! ILLUSIONIST! MIXER OF
DRINKS!

THAT IS YOUR CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE. VOTE
FOR THE RADICAL.

"It is false," cried Mrs. Kingconstance, wringing her hands. "Say, oh, say that it is a slander," she implored.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney smiled enigmatically. He had brought her the hand-bill himself. He was quite serene.

"You will come, as you promised, to hear my election address," he replied. "You shall be satisfied, that I undertake. I will explain all—all. And then I will leave it to you, my dear lady, to pronounce sentence upon me."

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The Great Hall in the county town, seventeen miles from Danehurst, had been taken on the occasion of Mr. Jellybond Tinney's election address to his constituents. It held several thousands of people and was crammed. A small gallery in a conspicuous position had been reserved for the candidate's friends. The candidate's friends were all ladies. Conspicuous among them, in the front row, were Mrs. Kingconstance and the witch from Thorne Lodge. Mrs. Kingconstance was beautifully dressed, as was her wont; and so also was the witch, but not according to her wont. Ordinarily she dressed like a woman of the people; but that day her black costume was of silk, satin, and lace, made in the most perfect taste, and admirably suited to her slender upright figure and dark handsome face. She wore it with the ease and grace of one accustomed to such clothes. Her striking personality immediately attracted the attention of the crowd. People all over the hall were asking each other who she was. There was no self-consciousness in her attitude, no restlessness. She held a fan in her hand, but did not use it. She looked about her with intelligent interest, her dark eyes steady, her composure perfect; and only two bright spots of color on either cheek betrayed the emotion which was working within. Babs, who had come for the pleasure of gazing at Cadenhouse, recognized her at once. Mrs. Kingconstance was too excited to see anybody. Her demeanor was as agitated as the other woman's was composed. She could not keep still a moment. She jerked disconnected remarks from one acquaintance to another, but did not attend to their answers. Her fan fluttered perpetually. She was really in a pitiable state of nerves.

Babs and Julia sat side by side—Julia radiantly self-satisfied, proud, and composed; Babs concealing the great gnawing ache at her heart by a brave show of calm indifference. The exquisite sweetness of her angelic

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little face was heightened by its transparent pallor and the bright fair hair that framed it. "Lily and Rose" the people called them, and the Rose was the most admired of the multitude.

Miss Kingconstance was also in the front row, and she, too, was radiant. As she was leaving the house, one of Cadenhouse's servants had ridden up with a letter for her. Mrs. Kingconstance had begged her to read it when they were settled in the carriage, but she had feigned indifference. For the rest of the day, however, the consciousness of that little letter in her pocket made her glad.

"Oh, dear! how much longer are we to be kept waiting?" Mrs. Kingconstance exclaimed from time to time, petulantly.

"Isn't it thrilling?" said Julia.

The audience was becoming impatient. Witticisms of a broad kind were being bandied about, scraps of popular songs were sung. Now and then somebody had to be marched out for disorderly conduct, which created a little diversion. There were thundering discharges of Kentish fire, varied by frantic clapping of hands. An agitated official appeared on the platform with some papers which he laid on the table. He was warmly greeted, and much complimented upon his pate, which was remarkably bald. At last the word went about "They're coming!" and a hush of expectation fell upon the crowd. In the ladies' gallery hearts beat high. Miss Spice jumped up in her excitement and then plumped down again. Mrs. Normanton's ample person was shaken with shivers of expectation. Fanny Sturdy and Florence Japp held each other's hands. Lady May's thin lips were tightly set, and Mrs. Japp's emotion betrayed itself in the pressure of her hand upon her heart. The witch of Thorne Lodge alone was normally calm.

The chairman entered first and took his seat. He was

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followed by Cadenhouse, Squire Normanton, Mr. Worringham, Jeffrey Wylde, Montacute, and various other county magnates.

When they were all seated, Mr. Jellybond Tinney entered a one.

Instantly there was a wild hubbub—applause, cheers, shouts, groans, hisses.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney came forward to the front of the platform, bowed to the audience, bowed also to the ladies' gallery, and then retired to the table, and sat down beside the chairman.

His platform manner was perfect; nobody there had ever seen him to better advantage. All his movements were easy, and he was exceedingly well dressed, and quietly, with the exception of one eccentric touch. From his watch-chain dangled a large gem, which flashed forth liquid light in rainbow tints at every movement. The attention of numbers of people became riveted upon this shining object; and indeed it seemed to have a great attraction even for those who escaped its special fascination, for their eyes sought it continually.

"He's a fine man, anyhow," was the frequently expressed opinion of the women in the body of the hall, and the same sentiment exhaled in stifled sighs in the ladies' gallery.

The chairman arose, and the preliminaries were gone through. They were not tediously long; everybody was only too anxious to get to the great business of the day.

Mr. Jellybond Tinney was half-way through his address before Mrs. Kingconstance heard a word of it. Fortunately for him even his political opponents were anxious to hear what he had to say for himself. To secure a hearing was all that he asked. If only they would listen he felt sure of winning the day.

He began slowly, and every rounded word rolled out

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clear and distinct to the farthest extremity of the crowded hall. His voice was not only fine in itself and cultivated, but finely managed. There was no sign of effort ; he was evidently a practised speaker, and his whole address was a fine oratorical success.

The moment he began Cadenhouse was reminded of his dream that night up in the high tower—the dream which had preceded Babs's first escapade.

Jeffrey leaned over to him and whispered : " Binks, of course ! "

" Of course," said Cadenhouse. " Without his beard."

" And he'll carry the day," said Jeffrey, " if he can make them forgive him for being Binks."

" I should say he'd make them proud of him for being Binks," said Cadenhouse.

The first words Mrs. Kingconstance clearly understood were bawled at the platform in a stentorian voice by one of the audience : " Who's Tinney Binks ? "

" Who is Tinney Binks ? " Mr. Jellybond Tinney answered, instantly. " I propose to tell you. In fact, I came here on purpose to tell you (*hear, hear*). I assure you that Tinney Binks never has had and never will have any reason to be ashamed of his name." ("*Oh ! oh !*" *groans, cheers, and a question* : " *Why did he drop it, then ?*") " For his own convenience. He took another name, as he had every right to do. It's a free country (*cheers*). But you don't go far enough back when you ask : ' Who's Tinney Binks ? ' You should ask first : ' Who *was* Tinney Binks ? ' Tinney Binks was my father. He was a respectable man (*cheers*). He married a respectable woman (*cheers*). But his name was not Tinney. Tinney was a nickname they gave him because he was a tinker—an itinerant tinker who went about mending pots and pans all over the country. I'm proud to say he was an honest man. Wherever he went they were glad to see him again ; and

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never a key was turned in a lock because he was about." (*"That's true. I mind him well," from an old farmer, and loud cheers.*) "His name was not Tinney, I repeat; but mine is. I'm his only child" (*"Not a bad specimen"*), "and he had me christened Tinney to show that he had no reason to be ashamed of the name. He started me in life with that name, and this piece of advice: 'Be an honest man,' he said; 'tell the truth and shame the devil' (*loud cheers*). That was the fortune he left me, ladies and gentlemen; and that is the fortune which has landed me here to-day—with lots of tin of my own, honorably earned (*cheers*); with the respect, I venture to hope, of all who know me. For if I had not deserved the respect of all who know me, should I have ventured to come forward to-day? Should I have been put forward to-day as a candidate for the honor of representing you in Parliament? (*cheers, hisses, and groans*). I hear hisses and groans. Now, I ask these gentlemen who hiss and groan, if I have not proved myself a man of some capacity (*"You have"*); and if it isn't better to have a man of some capacity like me, who knows every grade of society intimately, the good and the bad of them, the rights and the wrongs of them—I ask you isn't it better to return such a man, a sound, practical man, as your representative, than a man whose experience, whose interests, and whose sympathies do not extend beyond the little set in which he was born? Search into every detail of my career, and if you find me wanting, don't return me. How have I lived among you here, I ask you?" (*A voice: "Ask the ladies!"*) "I ask the ladies!"

He turned and bowed to the gallery. The ladies rose in their enthusiasm with one accord, and waved their handkerchiefs frantically. This display was greeted with prolonged applause.

The gallant gentleman wiped his forehead.

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"You will observe," he proceeded, "that the flattering mark of confidence with which the ladies have greeted me in response to my appeal was not unanimous. One lady remained neutral"—he alluded to the witch. "Why did she not rise? Ladies and gentlemen, it was not because she has no confidence in me, for it was her faith in me, her influence, her help, her strength of character, and her tenacity which made me the man I am, and finally landed me here. Who is that lady? That lady is my mother. And I am proud of her. And I ask every working-man here to-day, haven't I a right to be proud of her?" (*Hundreds of voices: "You have, sir!"*)

"Well, my lords, ladies, and gentlemen, having made my fortune, I took the name of Capell Augustus Jellybond Tinney, as I had every right to do. I kept the Tinney, you see, for my dear old dad's sake (*loud cheers*). And I came here. Do you know why I came here? Because it was my native place, and I had made up my mind that I would crown my career as I am crowning it to-day. I wanted to show every working-man here what a man may do for himself in a free country (*loud cheers*). I have been received as an equal everywhere, as an honest man should. I have tried to spend my money like a gentleman." (*A voice: "You have!"*) "I hope that I have won the best, the most beautiful, the most distinguished lady in the county."

He bowed to the ladies' gallery. During moments like these, when the multitude is moved, the humanities are about, and there is great levelling of classes. To everybody's astonishment, Mrs. Kingconstance rose to the occasion in every sense of the word. She carried a great bunch of roses tied with the candidate's colors, and when he bowed to her, she arose, leaned over the rail, and threw him the flowers. He bowed low, with evident emotion. His mother got up at the same time, and the two ladies shook hands in full view of the crowd amid

resounding cheers. Many people wiped their eyes, and expressed their opinions that it were "better nor any play they'd ever seen."

"My lords, ladies, and gentlemen," Mr. Jellybond Tinney resumed, in a voice vibrating with emotion, "I feel myself honored above all men. Only one thing is now wanted to crown my career right royally, and that I look to you to bestow. If you believe in me you will make me member for this constituency; and thereby you will prove to me and to the world that you admire my conduct, rejoice in my success, and approve of the example I have set you."

Prolonged cheers and shouts of "For he's a jolly good fellow!" greeted the conclusion of the address. Mr. Jellybond Tinney's mother was seen to wipe her eyes. This was the first symptom of weakness she had betrayed. Standing beside Mrs. Kingconstance during the handshaking and congratulations which followed, she bore herself with simple dignity. It was only then that Mrs. Kingconstance recognized her.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed. "It really is you. Well, how nice! Oh, those dear, *dear* days! And the luncheons and the little dishes, and the coffee"—her voice sank to a playful whisper—"the cordial and the cigarettes! You really *are* a dear, and so handsome, too! And you are going to be my mother-in-law. Well, how nice!"

Little Miss Spice came perking up, head bobbing, curls twining and untwining, all a flutter of feeling.

"I congratulate you," she cried, clasping Mrs. Kingconstance's hand convulsively. "And you, too, madam—*his* mother!" She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes. "Oh, what a man!" she added. "What a *noble* man!"

CHAPTER XLVIII

IMMEDIATELY after the election, Jeffrey went to see Cadenhouse, and found him in his tower. They began to talk about Binks, who had been returned in triumph by an overwhelming majority.

"I knew he'd succeed the moment I recognized him," Jeffrey remarked. "Binks's influence on an audience is magnetic. Read his speeches, and you find nothing in them; listen to them, and you are all aglow. You remember that night in London when I took you to hear him and drink Soul Revivers?—you remember how the people gazed at him? Once he caught their attention and riveted their gaze, he could do anything he liked with them."

"By the way, how did that night end?" Cadenhouse asked.

Jeffrey laughed.

"How did the other night end?" he rejoined.

"I haven't the remotest idea," said Cadenhouse.

"Neither have I," said Jeffrey; "neither has anybody, I'll bet, but Binks himself. Yet I am morally convinced that that cordial is an illusion—at least the effect of it is. If the liquor were as strong as it appears to be, the reaction would be unpleasant. But there is no reaction from it, no after-effect."

"So I observed. Yet I don't see how it acts."

"Plucky of the widow, wasn't it, to stand by him?" Jeff. remarked.

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"Er—yes, I suppose so," said Cadenhouse. "But I—er—dislike that sort of display myself."

"It's theatrical, of course. By the way"—he took out his note-book—"I'm interested in a theatre a friend of mine is running. I'll just make a note of that incident ; it might be useful to him."

When he had jotted down the note, he turned over the leaves of the book, and showed Cadenhouse a page on which were words and lines.

"Can you make that out?" he asked.

Cadenhouse could make nothing of it.

"That is meant for Babs," Jeffrey explained, "asleep under a tree—you know the spot. That's meant for the river. I found her there, fast asleep, and such a picture ! I thought it would make a good set. By the way, you are on very good terms with Babs, are you not?"

"I have known her all her life," Cadenhouse answered, stiffly.

"She's a pickle, or I'm much mistaken."

"Babs is erratic," Cadenhouse answered—"or rather she used to be erratic as a child. She is older now, and knows better."

"Erratic do you call it !" said Jeffrey, in a tone which was indescribably offensive to Cadenhouse.

"You are not speaking slightly of Babs, I presume?" he said.

"Not if your intentions are serious," Jeffrey answered, laughing.

"I do not in the least understand you," Cadenhouse rejoined.

Jeffrey laughed again.

A servant came in at the moment with a letter. Cadenhouse took it from him, and held it in his hand unopened.

"Don't be an old humbug," Jeffrey said, when they were alone again. "From something she let fall, I feel sure you know Miss Babs a lot better than you pretend."

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"I know nothing in the least to her discredit," said Cadenhouse, much annoyed. "And, what is more, I am sure she is incapable of doing anything in the least discreditable."

As the words left his lips, the door opened, and Babs the Impossible walked in.

She walked in with the easy air of one who is at home in the place.

When she saw the gentlemen, she stopped short.

For a few seconds Jeffrey Wylde looked hard at Cadenhouse, with a cynical smile on his face ; then he turned on his heel and left them together, without so much as another glance at Babs.

"Why is Jeffrey rude to me ?" she demanded.

"Because you are here," Cadenhouse groaned, clenching his nervous hand till the knuckles whitened.

"I beg your pardon for being here, Cadenhouse," Babs began. "I heard you had gone away. Ally Spice saw your omnibus with a lot of luggage on it pass on the way to the station—"

"Some guests were going," said Cadenhouse.

"And I was roaming about this afternoon without intention, and came to the tower," she pursued ; "and the door was open, and the impulse seized me on a sudden to run up—as you were away—to run up for a last look. I've been up to the top of the tower—not into the second stage, though the door was unlocked. You said you would show me that yourself some day, and unless you show me it yourself, I do not care to see it—now. I've been up to the top of the tower, looking down at the peaceful land, and at the sea ; all is so quiet, so infinitely calm, out there—such a contrast to the terrible turmoil here"—she clasped her hands to her heart. "Cadenhouse, I've made a mess of my life somehow. Everything has gone wrong with me. I don't know what I've done, but all the people about avoid me. Just now, down

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there on the road, Meg Normanton and her sister crossed over, so as not to have to speak to me ; and Lady May, passing in her carriage, turned her head aside ; and the other day Squire Normanton met me and nodded familiarly, without taking his hat off. What have I done ? What *have* I done ? I seem to have lost caste utterly. Nothing has gone right with me since you deserted me."

" Since *I* deserted you, Babs !" Cadenhouse exclaimed. " You sent me away."

Babs shrugged her shoulders expressively. Cadenhouse's countenance had contracted. He played nervously with the letter, which he still held in his hand.

" Pray open that letter," Babs said, bitterly. " I see you are more interested in it than in me."

" I must open this letter, Babs," Cadenhouse answered. " But, believe me, I mean you no discourtesy—and no unkindness either, Heaven knows ! I had no idea you—you—"

He broke off, and tore the letter open. As he read, his hand trembled and the color left his face.

" Bad news, I'm afraid," Babs exclaimed, with concern in her voice.

Slowly he folded the letter, and slowly he returned it to its envelope. He looked like one sore stricken.

" Babs," he said, " I think I ought to tell you at once. I had no suspicion that you—that I—that your decision was not necessarily final. And now I am bound in honor to marry your aunt."

" My aunt !" she cried, aghast. " You are going to marry Aunt Lorraine !"

" I am," he said. " This letter settles it."

They gazed a moment into each other's eyes. Babs made as if she would have said something, but her voice failed her. Cadenhouse was just in time to save her from falling. He made her sit down, he put some water



“‘YOU ARE GOING TO MARRY AUNT LORRAINE!’”

beside her ; then hurriedly, as if he could not trust himself, he did what he thought was best under the circumstances he left her alone.

It was late when Babs left the tower. A close carriage was waiting for her. She understood it was for her, because the footman opened the door when she appeared. She looked perfectly calm and collected, but she felt like one in deadly peril, whose every faculty is on the alert. There was something to be done ; she knew that there was something to be done—but what ? As she drove through the country lanes her mind pursued the vague idea, but could not grasp it.

Arrived at Dane Court, she was going straight up to her own room, but she had to pass her aunt's room on the way. The door was wide open. Babs stopped. The room was brilliantly lighted, and Miss Kingconstance was standing in the middle of it. She greeted Babs with a radiant smile. In her costume of white brocade, her pearls and her diamonds, she looked like a bride elect.

"She expects him to-night," flashed into Babs's mind, and sudden rage seized upon her.

She went up to her aunt, and dropped her a courtesy.

"Good-evening, Marchioness of Cadenhouse," she said. "I congratulate you."

"Oh, Babs, don't," Miss Kingconstance exclaimed, the light going out of her countenance—"don't call me that yet. Don't you know it's unlucky ? But—who told you ?"

The light returned to the lady's face. Babs was looking at her curiously. For the first time she appreciated her aunt's good looks, and she suffered a cruel pang.

"Who told me ?" she said. "Why, he did, of course. I was there when he read your letter."

"There—where ?" Miss Kingconstance asked, bewildered.

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"In the tower."

"In the tower—alone—with Cadenhouse!"

Babs hastened to explain. There was nothing mean in her nature; she was all for fair fight.

"You saw him read the letter?" Miss Kingconstance said.

"Yes."

"How did he take it? Did he look happy?"

"Anything but," said Babs.

"Babs! are you telling me the truth?" Miss Kingconstance cried.

"I *am* telling you the truth," Babs answered, pitilessly. "Are you under the impression that he loves you? I tell you he does not love you. It will be a marriage of intellect, a case of intellectual compatibility—ugh! You may be the love of his intellect, if you like; but I—I am the love of his heart. He loved me first; he loves me still. Didn't he tell you we were once engaged? He will always be a gentleman with you; he's a man with me. He'll never kiss you as he has kissed me—no! no! no! never! I'd kill him if he dared."

"Babs, you are killing me."

Miss Kingconstance sank into a chair, gasping, her hand pressed to her heart.

"You don't love him, either, Aunt Lorraine," Babs persisted; "you don't love him as I do."

"Babs, have pity!" Miss Kingconstance implored. "You will have a hundred chances of happiness. This is my only one."

The pathetic simplicity of this appeal released Babs's better nature. Self was set aside. She saw the other woman, down the long vista of the coming years, walking alone. Babs wrung her hands.

"Aunt Lorraine," she said, in a broken voice, "I don't want to spoil your happiness. If I had not seen you here to-night, mocking my misery with your radiant

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face, I should have held my peace, you would never have known. And, after all, what is there to be done now ? He is in honor bound to marry you. He said so himself."

"He said that, did he ?" Miss Kingconstance muttered.

Her face had grown haggard and worn and old since Babs began, and the girl's own little suffering heart was torn with compunction. She knelt down beside her aunt and laid her head upon her lap. Miss Kingconstance could not see her face.

"I've been talking wildly," Babs began. "Forgive me—and forget what I said. It's like this, Aunt Lorraine. I love Cadenhouse with all my heart, and Cadenhouse is going to marry you ; and for a moment I was mad with jealousy. Now I am myself again. As you say, I shall have other chances of happiness. There is Sir Owen. Don't expect me to kiss you and be glad just yet. It will be a day or two before I can make merry on the subject, but—"

Miss Kingconstance laid her slender hand on her niece's head ; tears were streaming from her eyes.

"Don't distress yourself, Babs," she said. "I understand you. I think I have always understood you better than any one else."

"You have always been good to me—"

"Be good to me now, then, Babs. This—all this—has been very bitter. It has come upon me unawares—"

"But it is over," Babs put in quickly. "I shall not come between you and your happiness ; give me that assurance, at least, for my comfort."

She rose to her feet as she spoke. Miss Kingconstance also rose. For a moment they held each other's hands ; then Babs went quietly from the room. She left her aunt sobbing hysterically.

Babs did not appear again that evening.

After dinner, Cadenhouse arrived, as in duty bound.

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He thanked Miss Kingconstance for the honor she had done him. He took her hand. On second thoughts he kissed it. It was like being engaged to an automaton.

"Do you wish the engagement to be announced at once?" he asked.

"No, Cadenhouse," she answered, gently.

CHAPTER XLIX

IT had been finally settled that Montacute was to spend the last year of his minority in globe-trotting, and Guy Spice was to accompany him.

They were to make their farewells and leave for London next day. The day after they were to embark at Southampton on a mail steamer bound for the East.

Late that night Montacute was sitting in the library reading, when the door opened, and Babs, still in her walking dress, came in.

"Montacute," she began, breathlessly, "you go to-morrow morning. Take me with you. For Heaven's sake, take me!"

Montacute put a marker in his book and closed it deliberately. Then he got up.

"What's the matter, Babs?" he asked.

"Cadenhouse is engaged to Aunt Lorraine."

Montacute looked at his sister a moment inquiringly; then he understood.

"Don't ask me questions," she pursued. "I must get away—I must get away. If I'm forced to stay here I can't keep sane."

"I've no wish to pry," he answered; "but could you be ready—you and Bertha?"

"Cute, you're a real gentleman!" Babs exclaimed, smiling a little herself at the old familiar phrase of their childhood. "Yes, we can both be ready. We've been packing the whole evening. I've heaps of things. You

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settle it with mamma. She'll see the wisdom of anything that leaves her alone with her love just now."

The East meant St. Lambert to Babs. She had some vague notion that if only she could see him comfort must come of it. But that hope was lightly bereft her by Barbara Land, who was the first person she encountered on going on board the steamer. Something in Barbara's countenance made Babs think of her Aunt Lorraine, as she had seen her look for a moment in her jewels and white brocade, something of the same radiance, the same serene content.

"You look as if you were going to be married," Babs said.

"My looks do not belie me," Barbara answered, smiling.

"Who is the happy man?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Not Mr. Jellybond Tinney, because he is going to marry mamma. No, I can't guess."

"Owen St. Lambert," Barbara said, pronouncing his very name as if she loved it.

Babs knew that she would not have married him herself; nevertheless, she felt as if she had lost a friend.

She strolled forward, found a deck-chair for herself, and sat apart, her young face turned resolutely from the receding shore.

The sun shone bright upon Southampton Water. The gray-green waves whitened off the bows of the steamer. Great gulls, with beautiful white wings expanded, hovered in her wake. Diaphanous clouds softened the radiant blue of the sky as with gossamer veils; light airs played upon the surface of the sea, and fluttered the flags, and fanned the face caressingly; and in it all—the freshness and the brightness and the speed—there was something of excitement.

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A strange silence had settled upon the ship since she started—a silence which seemed to enwrap her, so that the monotonous throb of machinery, the wash of the water and whispers of the wind, sounded extraneous and muffled, as though outside of the ship, above and beyond her.

Babs, sitting there alone, looking forward, was like one in a waking dream. By degrees a wonderful sense of exhilaration seized upon her. She had expected to be miserable, but instead of that, as the steamer fled onwards at full speed, and the aspect of all things altered, as the shore receded, and the air came full-flavored with the salt of the open sea, her heart expanded. Physical energy was in abeyance, but her mind was curiously on the alert ; and yet not her mind exactly, but rather that further-reaching faculty which, without form, is bodied forth—without going is there—without hearing or seeing or feeling, knows. All kinds of queer, irrelevant scraps of thought presented themselves, and, irrespective of her will, uninterrupted by reflection or observation, into her mind there flashed a measure of words, and there persisted :

“Change under the change-colored arches
Of changeless morning and night ;
Change under the change-colored arches
Of changeless morning and night”—

she sang softly in herself to the accompaniment of the throbbing engines, the waves, and the wind ; and, as she sang, it seemed to her that she was swaying with the swaying of the ship, and flying with the intermittent breeze, and floating on the buoyant sea.

A wave went by, a wave that would break at the foot of the cliff, at the foot of the tower, near enough almost for him to hear. She saw him sitting there alone with a book on his knee, calm, cold, and determined ; a man

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to do his duty without flinching, and then to die resigned. He would marry her aunt if need be, and banish Babs, even from his mind—banish her as though he had forgotten that it was she who had made him a man. As though he had forgotten !—therein was her joy, for she knew that he could not forget.

“Change under the change-colored arches
Of changeless morning and night ;
Change under the change-colored arches
Of changeless morning and night.”

In and out among her wandering thoughts the song ran on, a meaningless measure of words to her, yet, because of the measure, potent to help.

She saw the tall masts mark the swaying of the ship upon the sky ; she saw the swinging cordage ; she heard the wild rush of the water, cloven asunder by the mighty bows of the steamer ; she heeded the creak and jar and rattle which betrayed the pressure and strain of full speed. But to notice such things at such a time seemed trivial to Babs.

“I have no soul,” she sighed. Then, brightening :
“Have I no soul ?” she asked herself.

“Change under the change-colored arches
Of changeless morning and night.”

“Have I, indeed, no soul ?” she exclaimed, and smiled incredulously.

“Change under the change-colored arches
Of changeless morning and night.”

Cadenhouse had told her once that the soul is of slow growth, and there came to her now a quotation from an Eastern book : “Follow not after vanity, nor after the

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enjoyment of love and lust. He who is earnest and meditative obtains ample joys."

"Does he?" she asked of all things; "but bliss is twofold!"

She thought of Cadenhouse, there, in his tower alone, looking up at the quiet stars, and it was as if some one said to her:

"Enter thou reverently into the interests of his life, and thou shalt obtain a glimpse of his soul, and, having seen, thou shalt be no more the same forever."

But she turned from the suggestion. To be other than she was—no! Change might bring peace, peace without love. Babs chose deliberately—love without peace.

("Change under the change-colored arches
Of changeless morning and night.")

Scraps of conversation she had had at odd times with Cadenhouse recurred to her.

"We know everything," he had said to her one day. "There is nothing beyond our ken, if only we could get at the knowledge to use it."

"But can we?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"By leading the life. Clumsy scientific men torture animals to discover the secrets of life and death, and the more suffering they inflict the denser they become, the further from knowledge. Knowledge comes of the spirit; it dwells not in matter."

"But I want love," said Babs; "the dear human love. Nothing else will content me."

"Babs, you and I have both made mistakes," he answered. "It is in the nature of this ill-balanced humanity of ours to go to extremes. I have lived for the spirit, suppressing the flesh altogether; that was my mistake.

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You are living for the flesh. Will you not try and live a little for the spirit? There is no joy comparable to the spiritual ecstasy. Joys of the flesh are the lowest of all. Even intellect uninformed of the spirit is cold comfort."

"I believe you," said Babs. "I believe you. But first I must experience the dear human joys—I must!"

Now to herself she repeated the words triumphantly, and with a singular sense of power. It was as though she were compelling circumstances to submit to her ordering: "I must—I will!"

"Change under the change-colored arches
Of changeless morning and night;
Change under the change-colored arches
Of changeless morning and night."

Uninterruptedly the measure of words, meaningless to her, ran on and on, until at last incessant repetition wove the spell by which thought is suspended. Stumbling unawares upon the means, she had put her busy brain out of action and released her spirit. In her ears was a strange rushing sound for a little, and then darkness—slowly drawn like a large curtain—gathered about her. Passing from out of the darkness into a great light, she found herself face to face with Cadenhouse. She knew not what haven she had reached, upon what further stone she stood; but there they met.

Her brother's voice recalled her.

"You did well to come, Babs," he was saying. "You are looking splendid already."

"She will not marry him," Babs prophesied. "I know she won't."

THE END

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